



Australian Government
**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review 2025/019

Senator Deborah O'Neill - family reunion travel

1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023

Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority

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Senator Deborah O'Neill - family reunion travel

Executive summary

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an assurance review of Senator Deborah O'Neill's use of parliamentarians' work resources for family reunion purposes (family reunion travel resources) between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023 (period in scope).

Scope

2. The scope of this assurance review is family reunion travel by Senator O'Neill and her spouse between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023.
3. The purpose of the assurance review was to determine whether the family reunion travel resources were used in accordance with the legislative framework.

Reason for Review

4. As part of IPEA's review of parliamentarians' use of family reunion travel resources, IPEA undertook a preliminary assessment into family reunion travel by Senator O'Neill and her family members during the period 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023. After excluding family travel to and from Canberra, the preliminary assessment found that family reunion travel resources had been used by Senator O'Neill for a trip from Sydney to the Gold Coast and return, commencing on 4 November 2022 and returning on 6 November 2022.
5. On 4 February 2025, IPEA commenced an assurance review of Senator O'Neill's family reunion travel.

Outcome*

6. IPEA found that the use of family reunion travel resources was consistent with the legislative framework.

*Potential outcomes

There are three potential outcomes of an assurance review:

1. Consistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource complied with the law.

This means the available evidence, including information provided by the member, clearly shows that all obligations under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* were met.

2. Not inconsistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource was not shown to be against the law.

This means IPEA has accepted the member's explanation that they met their obligations under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*, and IPEA has not found any evidence to the contrary.

3. Not consistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource did not comply with the law.

This means there has been a misuse of a parliamentary work resource under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*. Where misuse is found, the value of the resource will be recovered, including any applicable penalty.

IPEA's statutory audit function

7. IPEA audits parliamentarians' use of parliamentary business work resources and the use of travel resources by their staff under section 12 of the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017 (IPEA Act). IPEA conducts assurance reviews to assess the use of resources against the legislative framework to determine if there has been misuse.

Legislative framework

8. Section 6 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017 (the PBR Act) provides the following meaning of **parliamentary business**:

The parliamentary business of a member means any of the following:

- (a) the **parliamentary duties** of a member, being activities of the member that:
 - i. relate directly to the member's role as a member; and
 - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(a);
- (b) the **electorate duties** of the member, being activities of the member that:
 - i. support or serve the member's constituents; and
 - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(b);
- (c) the **party political duties** of the member, being activities determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(c);
- (d) for a member who is an office holder or a Minister of State – the **official duties** of the member being activities that:
 - i. relate to the member's role as an office holder or Minister of State; and
 - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(d).

9. Subsection 6(4) of the PBR Act provides that the Minister must determine activities of a member that are parliamentary duties of the member, or electorate duties of the member, or party political duties of the member, or official duties of the member. The Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017 determines the activities which fall within the four duty streams set out in section 6 of the PBR Act.

10. Section 6 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (PBR Regulations) provides the meaning of **family reunion purposes** as:

A family member of a member travels for **family reunion purposes** if:

- (a) the member is travelling within Australia for the dominant purpose of conducting the member's parliamentary business; and
- (b) the family member travels to accompany or join the member; and
- (c) the travel by the family member is for the dominant purpose of facilitating the family life of the member's family.

11. Section 4 of the PBR Regulations provides the following meaning of **family member**:

- (a) the member's spouse or nominee;
- (b) a dependent child of the member;
- (c) a designated person in relation to the member.

Review process

12. Senator O'Neill and her spouse flew from Sydney to the Gold Coast on 4 November 2022, using parliamentary work resources for flights, ground transport and 2 nights of travel allowance. They returned to Sydney on 6 November 2022, using parliamentary work resources for flights.
13. On 4 February 2025, IPEA wrote to Senator O'Neill asking about the dominant purpose of her travel for the abovementioned trip and the nature of her parliamentary business, with reference to the Determination (**Attachment 1**). Senator O'Neill was also asked to advise whether her family member's travel met the three-part test in section 6 of the PBR Regulations. A response was requested by 28 February 2025.
14. IPEA engaged with Senator O'Neill on a number of occasions in relation to the assurance review (**Attachments 2 to 6**).
15. Senator O'Neill advised that she was on the Gold Coast for the dominant purpose of parliamentary business, specifically parliamentary duties, to attend the International Education Summit. She advised that the nature of her parliamentary business was 'speaking at and participating in a conference on international education on 5 November 2022'. IPEA notes the Senator delivered the opening address at the conference.
16. Senator O'Neill provided copies of documentation to support the response. The documentation provided included emails inviting her to the conference, her acceptance of the invitation, the program for the conference and an online summary report from the organisers of the International Education Summit.
17. Senator O'Neill confirmed her spouse's travel met the three-part test in section 6 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017.
18. Based on the information provided by Senator O'Neill, IPEA notes that the dominant purpose of the travel undertaken by Senator O'Neill to the Gold Coast was parliamentary business, specifically parliamentary duties, and that her spouse accompanied her for the dominant purpose of facilitating family life.

Conclusion

19. Based on the information made available by Senator O'Neill, IPEA found that the use of family reunion travel resources was consistent with the legislative framework.