

MINUTES – EMPLOYEE CONSULTATIVE GROUP (ECG) MEETING

Friday, 4 March 2011

10.00am – 1.00pm

Parliament House, Room 1R6

Present:

Ms Elisabeth Bateson	Office of the Special Minister of State
Ms Alison Byrnes	Office of Ms Sharon Bird MP
Ms Sharon Carnes	Office of the Hon Julie Collins MP
Mr Clancy Dobbyn	Office of Senator Gavin Marshall
Ms Evelyn Ek	Office of Senator Nick Xenophon
Mr Ron Kelly	Office of Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Ms Carmel Cook	Office of Ms Janelle Saffin MP
Ms Maxine Sells	Office of the Hon Tony Abbott MP
Ms Juliana Plummer	Office of Senator the Hon Christopher Evans
Ms Kim Travers	Community and Public Sector Union
Mr James Newbury	Office of the Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Ms Sallyann Innes	Office of the Hon Michael Keenan MP
Mr Rudi Oppitz	Australian Services Union
Mr Tony Nairn	Ministerial and Parliamentary Services (M&PS)
Mr Jon Box	M&PS
Mr Adam Lasscock	M&PS
Ms Hilda Selim	M&PS
Ms Marg Emerton	M&PS
Ms Racquel Patman	M&PS

Apologies:

Mr Greg McLean	Australian Services Union
Mr Michael White	Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance
Ms Imogen Birley	Office of Senator Christine Milne

Meeting Opened: 10.05am

Meeting Chair: Ms Sharon Carnes

Meeting Closed: 12.45pm

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies

- Ms Carnes opened the meeting at 10.05am and welcomed all attendees.

Agenda Item 2 – Business arising from the previous meeting

(a) Terms of Reference

- Mr Nairn advised that the ECG Terms of Reference had been finalised and sent out to ECG members via email.

(b) Minutes from the previous meeting

- Mr Nairn advised that the minutes from the previous meeting were distributed by M&PS to all ECG members and no amendments were requested. The ECG commented on the high quality of the minutes.

(c) Evaluation of Electorate Employees Working Hours and Electorate Staff Allowance (the Evaluation)

- Mr Nairn noted that the first component of the Evaluation, the timesheet exercise, commenced on Monday 28 February 2011. As requested by the ECG at the previous meeting, ECG members were notified via email when the timesheets were sent to participants so that they could endorse participation in the exercise.

(d) InDesign Support

- Mr Nairn advised that the '2020' helpline provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) does not provide support in relation to the actual use of InDesign.
- Mr Nairn noted that employees have the ability access InDesign training provided by Wizard Computer Training (Wizard) on behalf of the Department and that, after completing InDesign training, employees are able to contact Wizard for user assistance via phone, email and the web. Phone support is available from 8.30am to 5.30pm EST Monday to Friday.

(e) Workplace giving program

- The ECG requested that the item be discussed at the next meeting to allow the Australian Greens representatives, who were unable to attend the meeting, to be present and provide a list of their nominated charities.

(f) Corporate Responsibility Allowance (CRA)

- Mr Nairn reported that, as at 3 March 2011, there were 70 employees in receipt of CRA.

(g) Christmas shutdown period

- Mr Dobbyn advised that he had not yet had the opportunity to write to the Special Minister of State (SMOS) on behalf of the employee and union representatives on the ECG about accessing a Christmas shutdown period under miscellaneous leave.

(h) Medical exam requirements when returning to work

- Mr Nairn advised the ECG on the requirement for a medical practitioner to determine the fitness of an employee for duty (required in certain circumstances such as continual absence due to illness for a period of four weeks or more).
- Mr Nairn advised that M&PS applies this requirement with a degree of flexibility, depending on the nature of the illness or injury. For example where an employee submits a form for five weeks leave to have surgery, it would be highly unlikely that a request would be made. However, an extended period of leave over four weeks where the reason given is, for example, stress related, may lead to a request for assessment. The primary reason for the independent assessment is to obtain guidance as to whether it is safe for the employee to return to work and what support, if any, the employee or the office requires prior to or upon the employee's return to work.
- Mr Nairn advised that, if a request is made, the employee is required to go to a doctor as advised by M&PS in order to ensure that an independent assessment is made.

(i) Quality of the staff dining room at Parliament House

- The ECG noted that Ms Birley, who was unable to attend the meeting, was drafting a letter to DPS on behalf of the ECG in relation to the staff dining room issues.

(j) PDA devices

- Ms Bateson advised that the SMOS has requested a briefing from the Department in relation to PDAs.

(k) Mental health training provided to MOP(S) Act employees

- Ms Emerton advised that the training course *Communicating Effectively with Challenging Stakeholders*, which was provided as part of the Professional Development Program in 2010, was well received by attendees and will be made available again this year. Ms Emerton said that the training course included dealing with people who have mental health issues, including physiological disorders.
- Ms Emerton advised that the Employee Assistance Program service provider, Davidson Trahaire Corpsych (DTC), can provide counselling and training to individual offices that are experiencing specific issues with certain constituents who suffer from mental illness.

(l) Occupational health and safety (OH&S) presentation

- Ms Emerton presented an overview of OH&S services that are available to MOP(S) Act employees, including incident report and return to work programs, 24 hour access to counselling and support services through DTC, access to exit interviews, training for OH&S site officers and a flu vaccination program.
- Ms Emerton advised that a total of 12 exit interviews have been conducted since the service commenced in 2009. Ms Emerton advised that employees are informed of the option to participate in an exit interview upon termination of MOP(S) Act employment. Exit interviews can be conducted in person, via

telephone or the internet. Feedback from these interviews are de-identified before being provided to M&PS and are only provided to Senators and Members with the approval of the departing employee.

- Ms Emerton informed the ECG that new OH&S legislation will commence on 1 January 2012, and that the framework for a MOP(S) OH&S Committee will be dependent on the final legislation, therefore, it is expected that a MOP(S) OH&S Committee will be established in 2012. Ms Emerton advised that M&PS are currently working on improving on the ground services until a MOP(S) OH&S Committee can be established.

Agenda Item 3 – Enterprise Agreement 2010-2012 Guidelines

(a) Electorate Staff Allowance (ESA)

- The ESA Guideline was discussed and adopted by the ECG without change, following a lengthy discussion in relation to a number of issues surrounding ESA allocation by Senators and Members.
- Mr Nairn advised the ECG that the ESA guideline cannot alter the provisions surrounding ESA allocation by Senators and Members set out in the Enterprise Agreement.
- The ECG agreed to discuss ESA allocation issues and ideas to help address these issues at future meetings, noting that amendments to the ESA guideline may be suggested as a result.

(b) Salary Setting and Progression

- The Salary Setting and Progression Guideline was adopted without change.
- Ms Byrnes asked whether temporary performance progression might be able to occur where an employee works in the higher position for part of each week and in their usual position for the rest of the week. Mr Nairn noted that there is a four week minimum period for temporary performance progression in the Enterprise Agreement and agreed to consider this matter.

ACTION:

- M&PS to provide a response on this matter and draft any necessary amendment to the guideline.

Agenda Item 4 – Other business

- Ms Innes raised concerns over the confidentiality of the timesheet component of the Evaluation. She advised that the Liberal Party of Australia wish to forward completed timesheets to one office and then for that office to provide the timesheets to M&PS, noting that personal information, such as the employee's name and employing Senator or Member, would not be provided to M&PS.
- M&PS informed the employee representatives that it is desirable to have some information on the timesheets, such as geographical and ESA level information, so that a reasonable analysis of the data could be conducted to enable an accurate assessment of electorate officer working hours and ESA.
- Ms Plummer raised an issue regarding the operating hours of the M&PS Staff Help Desk (SHD). Ms Plummer noted that offices in Western Australia have fewer business hours in which they can contact the SHD when compared to the

eastern states due to the time difference. Ms Plummer asked whether it would be possible for the SHD to remain open later than usual at least once a week to allow for offices in Western Australian to access SHD assistance later on in their working day. Longer hours for the SHD immediately prior to each pay cutoff were also suggested.

ACTION:

- M&PS to provide information and advice to ECG members regarding single offices from each political party collecting, compiling and sending de-identified completed timesheets to M&PS for the Evaluation.
- M&PS to investigate the possibility of the SHD providing increased or varied operational hours.

Agenda Item 5 – Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be held at Parliament House on 25 March 2011 in room 1R4. Ms Sells agreed to chair the next meeting.