

MINUTES – EMPLOYEE CONSULTATIVE GROUP (ECG) MEETING

Friday, 11 February 2011

10.00am – 1.00pm

Parliament House, Room 2R2

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
Ms Imogen Birley	Office of Senator Christine Milne
Ms Carmel Cook	Office of Ms Janelle Saffin MP
Ms Maxine Sells	Office of the Hon Tony Abbott MP
Ms Kate Deverall (substitute)	Office of Senator Louise Pratt
Ms Kim Travers	Community and Public Sector 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

Apologies:

Mr Ron Kelly	Office of Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Mr Greg McLean	Australian Services Union
Ms Juliana Plummer	Office of Senator the Hon Christopher Evans
Mr Michael White	Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance

Meeting Opened: 10.10am

Meeting Chair: Ms Elisabeth Bateson

Meeting Closed: 1.00pm

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies

- Mr Nairn opened the meeting at 10.10am and asked for a volunteer to chair the meeting. Ms Bateson volunteered to chair the meeting and welcomed all attendees.

Agenda Item 2 – Terms of Reference

- Ms Bateson noted that ECG members were provided with the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) via email prior to the meeting so that they may be discussed. Ms Bateson asked the ECG for any comments or suggestions in relation to the draft TOR.
- Ms Deverall enquired about the proposed five working day period for ECG members to comment or suggest changes to circulated draft ECG meeting minutes. Ms Deverall noted that this may be especially difficult if draft minutes are circulated for comment during a sitting week. Mr Nairn advised that draft minutes would not be finalised and published online after the five working day consultation period if there is significant disagreement with the content, however, if no issues are raised, minutes would be finalised and published online after the consultation period. Mr Nairn also advised that, where ECG members have a significant disagreement with content and they do not have time to discuss the issue with M&PS prior to the end of the consultation period, ECG members can email M&PS with their issue and M&PS will not finalise and publish the minutes until the issue is discussed with the relevant ECG member(s).
- Ms Travers enquired as to the ability of MOP(S) Act employees who are not ECG members to attend ECG meetings to observe proceedings and how much notice M&PS requires for this to occur. Mr Nairn advised that MOP(S) Act employees may attend meetings of the ECG in the capacity of observers and that no notice is required.
- The ECG requested that substitute ECG representatives be included in all future distributions of documents and other material provided to the ECG.
- The ECG agreed to adopt the TOR .

ACTION:

- M&PS to include substitute ECG representatives in the ECG email distribution list.
- M&PS to publish the final version of the TOR.

Agenda Item 3 – Business arising from previous meeting

(a) Evaluation of Electorate Officer Working Hours and Electorate Staff Allowance

- Mr Nairn noted that the ECG had been emailed a draft of the timesheet that will be used to collect data on electorate employee working hours for the Evaluation of Electorate Officer Working Hours and Electorate Staff Allowance (the Evaluation).
- M&PS agreed to amend the timesheet to allow employees to record start and finish times each day.
- The ECG asked how many Senators and Members had volunteered their electorate office(s) to participate in the timesheet exercise. Mr Nairn advised that

20 Senators and Members had volunteered. Mr Nairn also advised that a total of 84 Senators and Members, including the 20 Senators and Members who volunteered, will be sent letters from the Special Minister of State (SMOS) either: thanking them for volunteering to participate in the timesheet exercise; or requesting them to participate in the timesheet exercise.

- The ECG requested that they be notified when M&PS contacts the employees participating in the timesheet exercise so they can endorse participation in the exercise.

ACTION:

- M&PS to amend the timesheet for the Evaluation to include the start and finish times.
- M&PS to notify the ECG when timesheets are provided to employees participating in the timesheet exercise.

(b) InDesign Support

- The ECG has contacted the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) in relation to telephone support for inDesign through the '2020' helpline and are waiting for a response.

(c) Workplace Giving Program

- The ECG advised that they had not yet decided on charities to be included in the program. Mr Nairn advised that the Department of Finance and Deregulation has a workplace giving program with a number of national and international charities that the ECG may wish to refer to.
- Mr Nairn advised that M&PS is able to implement workplace giving through its payroll system, provided an explanation of how workplace giving operates and advised that the arrangements, including tax implications, will be provided to all MOP(S) Act employees via a Departmental circular once the charities are selected and relevant administrative arrangements are completed.

ACTION:

- M&PS to provide the ECG with a list of charities in the Department's workplace giving program.
- ECG to select the charities to be included in the workplace giving program.

(d) Questions in relation to Airline Loyalty Points

- Mr Nairn provided the following responses to Mr Kelly's questions asked at the 16 December 2010 ECG meeting regarding the whole of Australian Government travel contract.

Question 1: *What savings were realised by the government on the contract with airlines as a result of the non-awarding of frequent flyer points?*

Negotiation of pricing under the whole of Australian Government travel contract was based on the combination of a number of factors, which included travellers not being awarded points, benefits or credits under any loyalty reward program. There was no separate identification of the savings that may have been due to the airlines not awarding loyalty points.

Question 2: *What is the actual saving to date and projected annual saving on airfares for MOP(S) staff as a result of this change?*

Budget Paper No. 2 – Budget Measures 2010-11 included a savings measure of \$32.8 million dollars (\$8.2 million per year) on travel by Senators, Members, their families, MOP(S) Act employees, former Parliamentarians and the surviving spouses and surviving de facto partners of Life Gold Pass holders. The proportion of these savings that relates to travel by MOP(S) Act employees was not separately estimated. Further, as noted in the above response, it is not possible to identify specifically the actual savings realised that may be due to the airlines not awarding loyalty points to parliamentary travellers, including MOP(S) Act employees.

- A lengthy discussion occurred in relation to Airline Loyalty Points and quantifiable productivity offsets for the next enterprise agreement for MOP(S) Act employees. Mr Nairn advised that such issues should be raised at bargaining meetings for the next enterprise agreement.

Agenda Item 4 – Discussion regarding minute taking

- The ECG requested that meeting minutes reflect the major points of discussion, specific concerns raised by certain ECG members, the response to these concerns and whether there is a result or action. The ECG advised that this would ensure that it is clearly reflected in the minutes that the concerns of employees have been raised.
- Mr Dobbyn, on behalf of Ms Plummer, noted that it is important that the tone of the minutes accurately reflects the discussion and emphasis behind it.

ACTION:

- M&PS to be mindful of the above points when taking and drafting ECG meeting minutes.

Agenda Item 5 – Enterprise Agreement 2010-2012 guidelines

- Mr Nairn noted that M&PS had re-circulated the four draft guidelines provided to the ECG prior to the 16 December 2010 ECG meeting including further information in relation to the changes to the guidelines, as requested by the ECG.
- Mr Nairn noted that, to avoid repetition, the draft guidelines generally no longer include provisions that exist within the Enterprise Agreement where the guidelines add no further information. The ECG requested that explanatory information provided to employees when guidelines are released mention this to avoid any confusion. Mr Nairn noted that the guidelines are open to further amendment at any time should there be a need.

(a) Corporate Responsibility Allowance

- The Corporate Responsibility Allowance (CRA) guideline was discussed and adopted with a minor change.
- Ms Carnes requested the number of employees in receipt of CRA.

- Ms Carnes noted that she has not received any reminders regarding quarterly OH&S checks. Other questions were asked by ECG members about the status of the OH&S Committee and OH&S matters generally. M&PS undertook to provide a more detailed briefing on OH&S at a future meeting.
- Ms Travers noted that an employee had had an overpayment of CRA deducted from their pay without being contacted beforehand. Ms Travers requested that employees be contacted prior to the recovery of an overpayment. Mr Nairn advised that this was M&PS' practice, as set out in the Enterprise Agreement.

ACTION:

- M&PS to provide the number employees who are in receipt of CRA.
- M&PS to provide a more detailed briefing on OH&S matters.

(b) Leave and Public Holidays

- The Leave and Public Holidays guideline was discussed and adopted with minor changes.
- The ECG asked about the addition of the words 'excluding Australian Army Cadets' under the Defence Force Service form of miscellaneous leave. Mr Nairn advised that the website of the Australian Army Cadets states that this is not Defence Force Service and the Department of Defence and Australian Public Service Commission had advised that there was no requirement to provide leave for cadets, unlike Reserves. Ms Carnes asked if this also applied to Air Force and Naval cadets. Mr Nairn said they would be the same as Army cadets and agreed to amend the guideline accordingly.
- The ECG indicated that they would like a Christmas shut down to be approved under miscellaneous leave. The ECG noted that they would write to the SMOS on this matter.
- Ms Cook requested information on the requirement for a medical practitioner to determine the fitness of an employee for duty (only required in certain circumstances such as continual absence due to illness for a period of four weeks) and whether the doctor is organised by the Department or if they could be an employee's doctor of choice. M&PS undertook to provide this information.

ACTION:

- Mr Dobbyn to write to the SMOS on behalf of the ECG about accessing a Christmas shut down period under miscellaneous leave.
- M&PS to provide the ECG with information regarding the requirement for employees to see medical practitioners to determine their fitness for duty in certain circumstances.

Agenda Item 6 – Agenda items raised by ALP representatives

(a) Travelling time for staff from rural, regional and remote areas

- Ms Cook raised concerns in relation to the amount of time spent travelling by some employees to/from their electorate to Canberra. Ms Cook noted that some employees who are not entitled to Excess (Canberra) Travel Leave are travelling for long periods of time or very early or late in the day and that this can affect efficiency and productivity.

- Mr Nairn advised that the annual review of offices entitled to Excess (Canberra) Travel Leave was almost complete and that the SMOS would write to any affected Senators and Members. Mr Nairn also advised that Senators, Members and employees may write to the SMOS at any time when changes occur to travel arrangements, such as flight schedules, to seek to have their office(s) entitled to Excess (Canberra) Travel Leave. Mr Nairn noted that requests should outline as much information as possible, such as flight schedules, total time spent travelling and the time that employees depart their work base to travel to Canberra.

(b) Opening hours and quality of the staff dining room at Parliament House

- The ECG discussed concerns with the quality of food in the staff dining room. The ECG agreed to contact DPS in relation to this matter.

ACTION:

- Ms Birley to draft a letter to DPS on behalf of the ECG on the staff dining room.

(c) Next round of enterprise agreement negotiations

- M&PS informed the ECG that the negotiations for the next agreement are to commence in the second half of 2011.
- Mr Nairn advised that it is anticipated that the bargaining framework for non-APS employees, which include MOP(S) Act employees, will be released by the Australian Public Service Commission soon.
- Ms Travers noted that the ECG may request information from the Department for the negotiation for the next agreement. Mr Nairn noted that it is anticipated that a staff representative group that is not the ECG will negotiate the next agreement, however, the ECG may outline areas where data may be requested. Ms Travers also noted that many negotiations that the CPSU has been part of have used a working draft of the agreement from the commencement of negotiations to focus and speed up the process.

(d) PDA devices (or access to email and intranet on private devices) for EO staff

- The ECG had a lengthy discussion in relation to PDA devices, their availability to electorate employees and difficulties of employees accessing their work emails on personal devices.
- Ms Bateson informed the ECG that there is no plan to provide electorate employees with PDAs.
- Ms Ek raised the issue as to the availability of replacement PDAs when repairs are required. Ms Ek noted delays with a replacement for a broken PDA and in arranging to have emails forwarded to a different device.

ACTION:

- Ms Bateson to follow up on the availability of replacement PDAs when repairs are required with DPS.

Agenda Item 7 – Other Business

- The ECG discussed the possibility of M&PS providing further training for MOP(S) Act employees in relation to handling situations where people suffering from a mental illness require assistance.
- Ms Sells advised that the ECG representatives of Liberal Party staff would be selected prior to the next ECG meeting.

ACTION:

- M&PS to investigate mental illness training for MOP(S) Act employees.

Agenda Item 8 – Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be held at Parliament House on 4 March 2011. Ms Carnes agreed to chair the next meeting.