

## MINUTES – EMPLOYEE CONSULTATIVE GROUP (ECG) MEETING

Friday, 25 March 2011

10.00am – 1.00pm

Parliament House, Room 1R4

### Present:

Ms Elisabeth Bateson	Office of the Special Minister of State
Ms Imogen Birley	Office of Senator Christine Milne
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 Sallyann Innes	Office of the Hon Michael Keenan MP
Mr Ron Kelly	Office of Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Mr James Newbury	Office of the Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Ms Maxine Sells	Office of the Hon Tony Abbott MP
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:

Ms Carmel Cook	Office of Ms Janelle Saffin MP
Ms Evelyn Ek	Office of Senator Nick Xenophon
Mr Greg McLean	Australian Services Union
Ms Juliana Plummer	Office of Senator the Hon Christopher Evans
Ms Kim Travers	Community and Public Sector Union
Mr Michael White	Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance

Meeting Opened: 10.05am

Meeting Chair: Ms Maxine Sells

Meeting Closed: 1.00pm

## **Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies**

- Ms Sells opened the meeting at 10.05am and welcomed all attendees.
- Mr Nairn noted that a union representative was not present and that the terms of reference for the ECG states that a formal meeting of the ECG will only be constituted when there is attendance from a least one member of each of the following groups:
  - (a) employee representatives;
  - (b) union representatives; and
  - (c) management representatives, including a nominee of the Special Minister of State (SMOS) and/or representatives from the Department.

The present employee representatives stated their willingness to continue with the meeting and recognise the meeting as a formal ECG meeting.

- Subsequently, Mr Dobbyn proposed the present employee representatives pass a formal motion stating: *“ECG representatives present are comfortable to proceed with today’s meeting without the presence of a union representative and that this course of action is cognisant of the terms of reference and is agreed to unanimously.”* The motion was passed unanimously.

## **Agenda Item 2 – Business arising from the previous meeting**

### **(a) 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.

### **(b) Evaluation of Electorate Employees Working Hours and Electorate Staff Allowance (the Evaluation)**

- Mr Nairn informed the ECG that M&PS has contracted newfocus Pty Ltd to conduct the telephone interviews and online survey components of the Evaluation.
- Mr Nairn advised that M&PS are currently formulating the interview and survey questions in consultation with newfocus and, once formulated, the questions will be provided to ECG members for consultation.
- Ms Bateson advised that she is the central collection point for electorate employees of Australian Labor Party Senators and Members who wish to have their timesheets de-identified.
- Ms Birley advised that electorate employees of Australian Greens Senators and Members will send their timesheets directly to M&PS via the evaluation email inbox.
- Ms Innes advised that electorate employees of Liberal Party of Australia Senators and Members who wish to have their timesheets de-identified have the option to send their timesheets to the Shadow SMOS’ office who will then provide them to M&PS via a de-identified method.

**(c) Workplace giving program**

- Ms Birley advised that the Australian Greens have added the following charities to the list of suggested charities for the workplace giving program – Bush Heritage Australia, Friends of the Earth, Landcare Australia and the Australian Conservation Foundation.
- There are a total of 26 charities suggested by ECG members. The ECG agreed to reduce this to 20 charities via a voting process.

**ACTION:**

- M&PS to circulate the list of suggested charities for voting by ECG members.

**(d) Christmas shutdown period**

- Mr Dobbyn circulated a draft letter addressed to the SMOS in relation to *Members of Parliament (Staff) 1984 Act (MOP(S) Act)* employees accessing a Christmas shutdown period under miscellaneous leave provisions within the Enterprise Agreement.
- Mr Dobbyn requested that comments be provided to him from ECG members via email by Friday, 1 April 2011.

**(e) Quality of the employee dining room at Parliament House**

- Ms Birley circulated a draft letter addressed to the Department of Parliamentary Services in relation to the employee dining room at Parliament House. The draft letter was provided to all ECG members via email on 21 March 2011.
- Ms Birley advised that she would redraft the letter based on feedback and recirculate the draft letter to ECG members.

**(f) Personal digital assistant (PDA) devices**

- Ms Bateson informed the ECG that the SMOS has received a briefing from the Department of Finance and Deregulation (the Department) in relation to PDA devices and that the SMOS was considering possible options in relation to the provision of IT equipment and services to Senators, Members and employees.
- Mr Newbury noted that wireless access to the APH network within Parliament House appeared to have been cut off. Ms Bateson agreed to look into this.

**ACTION:**

- Ms Bateson to investigate wireless access to the APH network within Parliament House.

**(g) Opening hours of the Staff Help Desk (SHD)**

- Mr Nairn advised that M&PS has investigated the possibility of the SHD increasing or varying their operating hours to enable employees in Western Australia (WA) to access the SHD during WA business hours.
- Mr Nairn reported that it would be difficult to increase or vary the operating hours of the SHD as it has very limited resources (four employees in total), and

that any increase of hours would reduce the SHD's operating capacity earlier in the day, a time when the SHD is typically busy.

- Mr Nairn also advised that, if the SHD were to remain open beyond 5pm Canberra time, many issues could not be dealt with until the next business day as the SHD would need to consult other areas within M&PS to gather relevant information and that the employees in other areas may not be in the office after 5pm.
- Mr Nairn informed the ECG that employees may contact their relevant M&PS Entitlements Manager in the case of an emergency.

### **Agenda Item 3 – Temporary Performance Progression (Higher Duties Allowance) – Part-time arrangements**

- Ms Byrnes raised an issue in relation to the application of clause 25.3 of the Enterprise Agreement that states '*temporary performance progression of an employee may only occur for a minimum period of four weeks*'.
- Ms Byrnes asked whether an employee could work at their normal classification for part of a week and temporarily progress to a higher vacant position for the remaining part of the week on an ongoing weekly basis for a period of four weeks or more.
- Mr Nairn informed the ECG that the Enterprise Agreement provides that temporary performance progression can only occur where an employee is progressed for a minimum period of four weeks, meaning that the four week period must be constant. Mr Nairn advised that the example outlined by Ms Byrnes would not allow for temporary performance progression as the employment of the employee was not constantly against the higher vacant position for a minimum period of four weeks.
- The ECG employee representatives agreed to write to the SMOS on this matter.

#### **ACTION:**

- Ms Byrnes to draft a letter to the SMOS to seek clarification of the meaning of the four week period for temporary performance progression in the Enterprise Agreement.

### **Agenda Item 4 – Enterprise Agreement 2010-2012 Guidelines**

#### **(a) Domestic Travel**

- Following the recent approval of a new MOP(S) Act Travel Determination, an amended Domestic Travel Guideline was circulated to each ECG member outlining proposed amendments to the guideline, including changes required as a result of the new Travel Determination.
- Mr Nairn outlined the most significant changes made to the Travel Determination in comparison to the previous version. Mr Nairn advised that electorate employees may travel as directed **anywhere** within Australia on official business and that, from 1 July 2011, the Electorate Staff Travel Budget applies to electorate employees of a Minister, Parliamentary Secretary, or Opposition Office Holder.

- The ECG requested, and M&PS agreed, that the word 'offered' not be amended to 'available' at paragraph 7 as the choice of fares is subject to information provided to employees by the travel service provider.
- The ECG raised concerns in relation to guideline paragraphs regarding the cap of \$200 per return journey for excess baggage and the payment of additional costs relating to personal stopovers. M&PS agreed to investigate these matters.
- The ECG agreed that the Domestic Travel Guideline be redistributed after M&PS investigate the above matters and make any minor amendments.

**ACTION:**

- M&PS to investigate the baggage allowance and personal stopover provisions within the proposed guideline and provide the ECG with an updated version of the guideline.

**(b) Ongoing, Non-ongoing and Casual Employment**

- The ECG noted that Ms Travers (absent) requested to defer this guideline until the next meeting. The ECG agreed to this request.

**(c) Travelling Allowance**

- The ECG advised that the guideline will be adopted subject to M&PS providing advice to the ECG in relation to eligibility for travelling allowance in cases where an employee stays in accommodation prior to a late night flight departure, e.g. 1.45am.
- The ECG had a general discussion regarding the possibility of an online system for submitting travelling allowance claims.

**ACTION:**

- M&PS to provide advice to the ECG on eligibility for travelling allowance where an employee stays in accommodation prior to a late night flight departure.
- Ms Innes to draft a letter to the SMOS regarding the possibility of an online system for submitting travelling allowance claims.

**(d) Learning and Development**

- The Learning and Development Guideline was adopted without amendments.

**(e) Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

- The EAP Guideline was adopted without amendments.

**(f) Part-time Work**

- The Part-time work Guideline was adopted without amendments.

**(g) Other Guidelines**

- The ECG agreed that both the Motor Vehicle Allowance and Relocation Expenses Guidelines be discussed at the next ECG meeting due to time constraints.

**Agenda Item 5 – Other business**

- No other business was raised.

**Agenda Item 6 – Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be held at Parliament House on Thursday, 9 June 2011.  
Mr Dobbyn agreed to chair the next meeting.