

# MINUTES – Work Health and Safety Committee Meeting

Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021

GovTeams

Meeting Opened: 10.35 am  
Meeting Closed: 11.35 am  
Meeting Facilitator: Tim Abrahams - Ministerial and Parliamentary Services  
Department of Finance (Finance)

## Present:

Name	Representative
Bryden Toner Office of Dr Mike Freeland MP	Australian Labor Party
Kate Boyd (Deputy) Office of the Hon Ed Husic MP	Australian Labor Party
Jorden Gunton Office of Senator Wendy Askew	Liberal Party of Australia
Leonie Lloyd-Smith Office of Rowan Ramsay MP	Liberal Party of Australia
Stella Weston-Smith Office of Mr Andrew Wilkie MP	Independents
David Mejia-Canales Office of Senator Lidia Thorpe	Australian Greens
Adity Roy-Chowdhury	Marsh
Emilia Diaz	Marsh
Tim Abrahams (Finance)	Management Representation
Jill Flinders (Finance)	Management Representation
Ellen Laenen (Finance)	Committee Secretariat
Anna Finnegan (Finance)	Observer - Management Representation

**Apologies:** Apologies have been received from Kate Sutherland, office of Ms Lisa Chesters MP; Helen Lewis, office of the Hon Stuart Robert; Gai Coghlan, office of Mr Chris Hayes; Simon Kelly, office of Mr Lew O'Brien and Michelle Hutchinson, from the Special Minister of State's office.

## Agenda Item 1 – Welcome

- Mr Abrahams welcomed the members of the committee and delivered the acknowledgement of Country.
- Apologies were noted from Kate Sutherland, Michelle Hutchinson and Helen Lewis.
- Mr Abrahams provided an update on the Jenkins Review noting that:
  - The Government has now released the Report into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces undertaken by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Kate Jenkins and the Australian Human Rights Commission, Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces to Government.
  - The Government will consider the Report and will consult with the opposition, minor parties and independents and MOP(S) Act employees in developing a response to its recommendations.
  - Unless an election is called, it is anticipated that Finance will be in a position to brief the committee on the implementation of some of the recommendation, (noting that many of the recommendations may be underway at that time), at the next WHS Committee meeting.

## Agenda Item 2 – Updates to WHSC Membership

- Ms Flinders advised that Georgia Blackburn, from the office of Senator Dorinda Cox has been elected as a Deputy HSR for the Australian Greens. Ms Blackburn will take over the role of SAO from Mr Mejia-Canales.
- There is a SAO vacancy for the Liberal Party however Luke Barnes has indicated he is interested in taking over the role.

## Agenda Item 3 – Christmas Parties – WHS Considerations

- Ms Weston-Smith queried whether there was any WHS guidance to consider in relation to end of year celebrations, in particular, whether office Christmas Parties can be held at an employee's private residence rather than a public venue and whether there were any COVID-19 and vaccination requirements
- Ms Flinders reiterated that any end of year gathering is essentially an extension of the workplace. It is a requirement to ensure any planned activities are COVID-safe and in line with health directions from relevant state or territory authorities. Managers should set expectations to staff in relation to appropriate behaviour, safe travel and alcohol consumption.
- Ms Flinders advised that Finance would again send out communication this year outlining this guidance, and sought any further inclusions from the committee to be provided out of session.

**Action item 1: Finance to provide communication to staff on end of year WHS arrangements for staff parties.**

## Agenda Item 4 – Actions arising from the previous meeting

- Ms Flinders provided an update on the Sexual Harassment and Safe and Respectful Workplace Policy, which was previously provided to the committee for consultation after the last meeting.
- Feedback received from the consultation period 20 August 2021 to 22 September 2021 has been considered and incorporated into the draft policies.
- Ms Flinders advised that due to the release of the Independent Review into Parliamentary Workplaces Report (Jenkins Report) the draft policies will be reviewed in light of the recommendations of the report.

- Once reviewed in line with any endorsed recommendations from the report the taskforce will consult further with Parliamentarians and employees before finalising the policies.
  - Mr Abrahams noted that, at the recent meeting, the Employee Consultative Group (ECG) requested to meet with the WHS Committee and Ms Jenkins to receive an update on the report. Finance will advise the Committee when this will be scheduled.
  - Mr Toner queried whether the Sexual Harassment and Safe and Respectful Workplace Policy will be open for a further period of consultation after the further review. He requested a longer time period for comment to enable consultation with workgroups, and suggested Finance issue a circular advising of the availability of the Policy for comment. Mr Abrahams will consult with the Workplace Reform Team within Finance and confirm arrangements.
- Action item 2: Finance to advise whether Sexual Harassment and Safe and Respectful Workplace Policy will be available for further consultation, and how staff will be made aware.

### Agenda Item 5 – Policy Discussion

- Ms Flinders confirmed that 3 draft policies had been provided to the WHS Committee out of session for consultation. These were:
  - Workplace Adjustment Policy
  - Rehabilitation and Injury Management Policy
  - Early Intervention Policy
- It was noted that these are policies already in place, but following an internal audit they have been updated for best practice and alignment with the current environment. Ms Flinders advised Finance was open to any feedback or comment on these policies.
- Ms Flinders also noted that additional WHS policies would be provided to the Committee shortly for comment, including:
  - Fatigue Management Policy
  - Infection control Policy
  - Work-related violence and aggression Policy
  - Workplace health safety and wellbeing Policy
  - Domestic and Family Violence Policy
- Ms Flinders sought feedback on appropriate timeframes for consultation to ensure adequate opportunity to engage with respective workgroups.

### Agenda Item 6 – WHS Report Overview

- Ms Roy-Chowdhury discussed the quarterly WHS report for the period of 1 July to 30 September 2021 (3rd Quarter). She noted key statistics in the report:
- There were 18 incidents and 9 resulted in injuries. There were 2 notifiable incidents and 46 hazards registered. 12 onsite WHS ergonomic assessments were completed as well as 4 online self-assessments.
- Mr Toner queried the rationale for the inclusion of a particular incident in the report, noting as it did not occur during work time. Ms Flinders confirmed it was a regulatory requirement to report certain categories of incidents to Comcare, which is why this incident was included in this instance.
- Ms Roy-Chowdhury also noted an increase in the use of the Skytrust App to complete quarterly workplace inspection checklists and advised that Marsh is promoting the availability of the online ergonomic self-assessments as MOP(S) Act employees transition back in their workplaces.
- Ms Boyd advised that she had received negative feedback from some staff regarding the experiences with Comcare Case Managers as part of their compensation and/or rehabilitation

plans. Ms Flinders advised that Finance will address the concerns with their Account Manager and requested that any examples or instances of poor service are reported to Finance.

### Agenda Item 7 – MOPS WHS Update

- Ms Flinders provided an update on various WHS matters. Finance has responded to a range of enquiries in relation to COVID and WHS issues and has updated the FAQs on the website to include information about queries that have been trending. Other WHS trends reported have included increased demonstrator activity across the country, constituent/client aggression, as well as water ingress issues and mold.
- Ms Finnegan noted that Finance should be advised of any COVID related incidents as Finance is required to report to them to Comcare. Offices should ensure their COVID-safe Workplace Plans are updated.
- Mr Toner queried whether offices can access Rapid Antigen Tests for workplaces. Ms Flinders advised that issue has been raised and advice is currently underway so will be able to advise the Committee of an update shortly.

**Action item 3: Finance to update Committee on potential for MOP(S) Act employees to have access to Rapid Antigen Tests in offices.**

- Mr Majia-Canales advised that staff in some offices are experience psychological stress as a result of racist and abusive communications being sent to offices. Ms Finnegan noted similar concerns have also been reported and she outlined support options Finance can provide to support staff. Mr Abrahams advised that Finance would distribute this information to HSRs with the draft minutes.
- The Committee discussed the process when an office notifies Finance and Comcare of a positive COVID case in an office. Finance advised that Comcare provides a final report, which Finance will now forward on to the office at the conclusion of the process.

**Action item 4: Finance to send through details of support resources and materials to committee members that are available to staff.**

### Agenda Item 8 – Other business

- The Committee discussed the use of the dedicated parliamentary support line - 1800 APH SPT, and requested an update on the uptake and whether there had been any increase in use since the Jenkins report was published. Finance advised data would be provided out of session.

**Action Item 5: Finance to provide data of use of 1800 APH SPT to the committee out of session**

- Ms Boyd advised that she had received complaints that counsellors on 1800 APH SPT had turned some callers to EAP rather than providing support. Ms Flinders will pass these concerns on to the Contract Manager.
- Mr Toner enquired whether any of the recommendations made in the Foster review were progressing. Ms Flinders confirmed that the establishment of the PWSS has been implemented following the report, and advised that the head of PWSS has been invited to attend the next WHS Committee meeting and will be available to answer any questions, so discussion on the Foster review was deferred until the next meeting. Ms Flinders also confirmed that there are no employees from Finance working within PWSS.
- *Mr MC – is there an increase in calls to PWSS in the last week given Jenkins reporting? Feedback on PWSS is very positive, met with a lot of care when using. May be confusion with what number to call? How are the services promoted to people to make sure the right one is used. Mr Abrahams advised we are going to map out contacts and that can be provided to the whS committee as well as ECG. We are unable to share or access uptake data on PWSS usage as they are independent .*

- Ms Finnegan advised that information on which service to contact has been provided in the WHS Safeguard newsletter. In anticipation of the release of the Jenkins Report onsite EAP services at APH, which has been available for each sitting period has been increased however use of the services has been low.
- Mr Toner queried whether the EAP services could be made to staff in regional or remote arease or whether other outreach services were available. Ms Finnegan advised critical incident debriefs can be provided under the EAP and would liase with Mr Toner if there are specific offices he is aware of who could benefit from these sessions and update any outgoing communications to promote the availability.
- Ms Boyd provided positive feedback in relation to the onsite EAP services at APH and requested that the services are extended during future sitting weeks to be available during the following week. Mr Abrahams advised that Finance will explore that option.  
**Action item 6: Finance to explore potential to expand onsite EAP services at APH to include the week after a sitting period.**
- Ms Flinders thanked the committee for their consistent and positive contribution during their tenure in the event there are no further meetings if an election is called. She advised that the Terms of Reference would be updated and invited any early feedback members would like to provide prior to a draft being circulated to the new committee.
- Ms Weston-Smith queries whether HSRs would need to re-nominate for their roles if their Parliamentarian remains. Ms Finders clarified that a new committee would be constituted and information would be provided at the time. Ms Flinders also advised information is available on the MaPS Website regarding termination triggers and deferral periods for MOP(S) Act employees following a Federal Election.

### Agenda Item 9 – Next meeting

- The next WHS committee meeting will advised out of session in accordance with the Terms of Reference and to align with parliamentary calendar, potentially on 18 February 2022.

### 3 December 2021 WHS Committee Action Items

Action item 1: Finance to provide communication to staff on end of year WHS arrangements for staff parties.

Action item 2: Finance to advise whether Sexual Harassment and Safe and Respectful Workplace Policy will be available for further consultation, and how staff will be made aware.

Action item 3: Finance to update Committee on potential for MOP(S) Act employees to access to Rapid Antigen Tests in offices.

Action item 4: Finance to send through details of support resources and materials to committee members that are available to staff.

Action Item 5: Finance to provide data of use of 1800 APH SPT to the committee out of session

Action item 6: Finance to explore potential to expand onsite EAP services at APH to include the week after a sitting period.