

MINUTES – Work Health and Safety Committee Meeting

Friday, 25 February 2022

GovTeams

Meeting Opened: 3.00 pm
Meeting Closed: 4.00 pm
Meeting Facilitator: Tim Abrahams - Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
Department of Finance (Finance)

Present:

Name	Representative
Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham Minister for Finance	* Attended for agenda item two only
The Hon Mr Ben Morton MP Special Minister of State	* Attended for agenda item two only
Bryden Toner Office of Dr Mike Freeland MP	Australian Labor Party
Gai Coghlan Office of Mr Chis Hayes MP	Australian Labor Party
Kate Sutherland Office of Ms Lisa Chesters MP	Australian Labor Party
Jorden Gunton Office of Senator Wendy Askew	Liberal Party of Australia
Helen Lewis Office of the Hon Stuart Robert MP	Liberal Party of Australia
Leonie Lloyd-Smith Office of Rowan Ramsay MP	Liberal Party of Australia
Simon Kelly Office of Llew O'Brien MP	The Nationals
Stella Weston-Smith Office of Mr Andrew Wilkie MP	Independents
Jordan Piggott	Community and Public Sector Union
Ben Crowther	Marsh
Emilia Diaz	Marsh
Michelle Hutchinson Office of the Hon Mr Ben Morton MP	Management Representation
Tim Abrahams (Finance)	Management Representation
Cassie Alexander (Finance)	Management Representation
Jill Flinders (Finance)	Management Representation
Georgia Weichert (Finance)	Management Representation
Ellen Laenen (Finance)	Committee Secretariat
Cathy Stokes (Finance)	Observer - Management Representation
Brad Walters (Finance)	Observer - Management Representation
Keziah Nelapati (Finance)	Observer - Management Representation
Manning Fell	Observer – PWSS

Apologies: Rosemary Little, Office of the Hon Peter Dutton MP

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome

- Mr Abrahams welcomed members and delivered the Acknowledgement of Country.
- An apology was received for Rosemary Little.
- Mr Abrahams introduced Manning Fell, Director of the Communication and Support Team in PWSS who attended as an observer.

Agenda Item 2 – Discussion on the Set the Standard Report and Recommendations

- Mr Abrahams welcomed Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham and the Hon Ben Morton MP to the meeting.
- Mr Abrahams noted that Kate Jenkins attended an extraordinary WHS and ECG meeting on 16 December 2021 to brief members on the *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces* (Set the Standard Report) and address questions.
- Mr Abrahams advised that the Ministers sought the committee's feedback on the Set the Standard Report and would share updates on the progress of implementing its recommendations.
- The Ministers both thanked the committee for their previous input and assistance in terms of establishing the independent review, and engaging with Ms Jenkins and other staff.
- Minister Birmingham noted that this committee is a powerful vehicle for engagement, and encouraged members to continue engaging throughout the implementation phase.
- It was noted that Ms Kerry Hartland has been appointed as Chair of the Leadership Taskforce overseeing the implementation of the recommendations the Set the Standard Report. Ms Hartland intends to use this committee as a key channel for consultation.
- Mr Toner provided feedback from staff regarding the timing of the recent formal apology noting that many staff would have liked to have been made aware of the announcement beforehand.
- Minister Birmingham acknowledged that there was limited notice to staff regarding the formal apology, however the Government ensured that the Australian Human Rights Commission had contacted all individuals who had participated in the independent review to advise them of the formal apology prior to statement being made.
- Mr Toner also queried whether the committee could be provided with a monthly update on the steps being taken to implement and progress the recommendations from the Set the Standard Report. Minister Birmingham noted Ms Hartland may come to future committee meetings to provide updates.
- Mr Piggott queried what the consultation process would look like noting that any matter relating to WHS under the WHS Act should be consulted with the entire workforce.
- Minister Birmingham confirmed that some of the recommendations to be implemented require broad consultation, and there will be a public process of engagement in relation to those reforms, some of which have already commenced.

Agenda Item 3 – Updates to WHSC Membership

- Mr Abrahams advised that there had been no updates to the WHS committee membership since the last meeting.

Agenda Item 4 – Actions arising from the previous meeting

- Mr Abrahams noted that all action items arising from the previous meeting were addressed in an email to committee members on 23 December 2021.
 - Finance agreed to provide an update of usage of the 1800 APH SPT line for the months of December 2021 and January 2022. Mr Abrahams advised that three calls had been made in December 2021, and none in January 2022.
 - Mr Toner raised the issue of access to Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) by staff, noting that they were available to order through COS, but offices were not permitted to do so. Mr Toner noted that RATs are a risk mitigation tool that Australian Parliament House (APH) and Finance should be implementing. Ms Flinders confirmed that Finance's position is not to provide funding or access at this time.
 - The committee discussed temperature checking requirements at APH, and the management and communication of a recent COVID outbreak at APH. Ms Flinders commented that the temperature checking arrangements were put in place to mitigate risks, however Finance will pass on feedback to the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS).
- Action item 1: Finance to provide feedback to DPS regarding the temperature checking arrangements at APH.**
- Mr Piggott commented that, for this committee to run effectively, all respective and relevant PCBUs who have an involvement in the workplaces of MOP(S) Act employees should be a party to the WHS committee. Mr Abrahams noted that the Set the Standard Report contains a lengthy section regarding providing clarity around WHS duties. Mr Abrahams noted there will be an opportunity to review committee membership when the Terms of Reference is updated for the new committee following the Federal election.

Agenda Item 5 – Policy update

- Mr Abrahams thanked the committee for the feedback received in relation to the eight draft policies that were recently provided for consultation. These were:
 - Draft Domestic and Family Violence Policy
 - Draft Workplace Adjustment Policy
 - Draft Early Intervention Policy
 - Draft Fatigue Management
 - Draft Injection Control Policy
 - Draft Rehabilitation and Injury Management Policy
 - Draft Workplace Health Safety and Wellbeing Policy
 - Draft Work Related Violence and Aggression Policy
- Mr Abrahams advised that Finance had only received minor feedback on three of these policies. Given the limited feedback, Finance has taken that as the Committee's broad endorsement. Mr Abrahams noted that the draft policies are currently with DPS, the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives for consultation with feedback due by 4 March 2022. The policies will be finalised and published as soon as possible.

Agenda Item 6 – WHS Report Overview

- Mr Crowther discussed the quarterly WHS report for the period of 1 October to 31 December 2021 (4th Quarter). He noted key statistics in the report:
 - There were 49 incidents reported for this period. Of the incidents reported, 20 resulted in injury (five were psychological, one psychological incident was both an injury and a hazard).
 - There were five notifiable incidents.

- There were 31 hazards registered. Seven were psychological, with one psychological incident that was both an injury and a hazard.
- There were 31 onsite ergonomic assessments and six online ergonomic self-assessments conducted.

- Ms Sutherland requested feedback on the uptake of the *Safe and Respectful Workplaces training program*. Mr Abrahams commented that uptake was strong, and Finance would provide data on notice.

Action item 2: Finance to provide feedback on the progress of the Safe and Respectful Workplaces training program.

- Mr Toner noted there was a significant spike in psychological injuries reported, and queried whether this was attributed to the Jenkins Review process and discussions about workplace culture. Mr Crowther commented that generally speaking they related to a specific individual workplace, but would confirm.

Action item 3: Marsh to confirm whether the spike in psychological incidents is attributed to workplace culture reform discussions.

Agenda Item 7 – MOPS WHS Update

- Mr Abrahams introduced two new members of MaPS – Cathy Stokes, Director of the HR Advice and Support Team, and Brad Walters, Assistant Director of the HR Advice and Support Team.
- Mr Abrahams provided an update of key WHS trends and issues raised, noting:
 - A number of WHS/EAP related communications have been delivered during this period to relevant MaPS staff including the:
 - monthly EAP reminder to all staff and Parliamentarians,
 - quarterly Workplace inspection reminders sent to WHS site officers
 - quarterly EMS Bulletin sent to WHS officers, Emergency officers, deputy emergency officers and first aid officers
 - quarterly Safeguard Newsletter sent to all staff and Parliamentarians scheduled to issue on Monday, 28 February 2022.
 - There continues to be a range of general enquiries in relation to Covid and WHS issues (particularly around vaccination, covid-testing arrangements, Covid-support arrangements and opening of Electorate Offices).
 - The Covid page on the MaPS website has been updated to include further information, including on RATs.
 - The recent Parliamentary sitting period observed a slight increase in Covid queries and contract tracing with three notifiable incidents.
 - Other trends have included – increased demonstrator activity in Canberra (Extinction Rebellion etc) and anti-vaxxers in association with the recent Parliament sitting period.
- Ms Sutherland raised concerns regarding the likely increase in protester activity in the lead up to the election, and the WHS implications. Ms Flinders advised that Finance would provide guidance on protester activity, and replicate it in on the WHS and Election pages of the MaPS Website

Action item 4: Finance to publish guidance on the MaPS Website regarding protester activity and WHS considerations.

- The committee provided positive feedback in relation to the advice distributed to all staff regarding work Christmas Parties. Ms Weston-Smith requested this advice is provided earlier in December in subsequent years.
- Ms Flinders noted that an all staff email will be issued once the election is called which will point to WHS information and resources.

Agenda Item 8 – Other business

- Mr Abrahams advised it is likely that the Federal Election will be called prior to the next meeting period, so that the next meeting is not likely to occur until post-election. It was noted there is no formal direction in the ToRs regarding the processes and arrangements of a WHS committee during caretaker mode. Finance will not likely schedule meetings during this time, but proposes to ensure that the committee still operates, noting that there may still be a need for Finance to share information and members to raise WHS concerns and queries during the election and caretaker period.
- Mr Toner raised concerns regarding an increase in delegated programs and grants directed upon electorate employees, and the lack of consideration of the effect this has on their workload. Ms Flinders committed to seek further information from Mr Toner out of session, and discuss support and options available.

Action item 5: Mr Flinders and Mr Toner to discuss support mechanisms for electorate employees experiencing increased workloads due to grants and programs being delegated to them from other Departments.

Agenda Item 9 – Next meeting

- There is no formal meeting scheduled at this stage, noting that extraordinary meetings may be held if required.

25 February 2022 WHS Committee Action Items

Action item 1: Finance to provide feedback to DPS regarding the temperature checking arrangements at APH.

Action item 2: Finance to provide feedback on the progress of the *Safe and Respectful Workplaces training program*.

Action item 3: Marsh to confirm whether the spike in psychological incidents is attributed to workplace culture reform discussions.

Action item 4: Finance to publish guidance on the MaPS Website regarding protester activity and WHS considerations.

Action item 5: Mr Flinders and Mr Toner to discuss support mechanisms for electorate employees experiencing increased workloads due to grants and programs being delegated to them from other Departments.