

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (WHSC) MEETING 3 – RECORD OF MEETING

Friday 16 June 2023
GovTEAMS

Meeting opened: 14:05
Meeting closed: 15:16

Meeting Chair: Amanda Bruce – Department of Finance, Assistant Secretary,
HR Frameworks Branch

Attendee	Office
Lisa Banyard*	Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
Leanne Coleman*	Hon Kristy McBain
Alex West*	Senator the Hon J McAllister
Hafiz Jan*	Ms Cassandra Fernando MP
Emma Garbutt*	Mr Adam Bandt MP
Stella Weston-Smith*	Mr Andrew Wilkie, MP
Bonnie Pederson	Office of the Special Minister of State
Emma Groube	CPSU
Jess Stone	CPSU
Joshua Polak	USU
Bryce Wilson	Representing ASU
Caroline Fazekas	Marsh
Victoria Su	Marsh
Jill Flinders	Finance, Director, HR Policy and Assurance
Ellen Laenen	Finance, Asst. Director, HR Policy and Assurance
Kayelene Evans	Finance, Asst. Director HR Advice and Support
Belinda Miners	Finance, Asst. Director HR Advice and Support
Robyn Morosin	(Observer) Finance, HR Advice and Support
Taylah Yaccob	(Observer) Finance, HR Advice and Support
Simon Bartholomew	Finance (Secretariat)

* Health and Safety Representative

Apologies:

Mary Von-Marburg* (Office of Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash)

Simon Kelly* (Office of Mr Llew O'Brien MP)

Kate Sutherland* (Ms Lisa Chesters MP)

Tamsin Anspach* (Office of Senator the Hon Penny Wong)

Chantal D'Argville (Hon Peter Dutton MP)

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

- The Chair opened the meeting with an acknowledgement of country.

Agenda Item 5 - Psychosocial hazards

- Committee members asked the Chair if the meeting could immediately address the issue of psychosocial hazards (agenda item 5) in the context of recent events at Parliament House. This was agreed by the Chair and all of the members present.
- Key points from this discussion were:
 - Current events have raised historical issues and employees are reporting being re-triggered about related psychosocial issues more broadly in the workplace.
 - Members reported feeling that positive changes had occurred but are now feeling exhausted by a sense of ‘it happening all over again’.
 - Members reporting that communication by constituents, including social media commentary, is increasing in volume and at times disturbing in nature. It was highlighted that electorate officers are particularly impacted by this behaviour due to the more isolated nature of the work environment.
 - Members reported that constituents may share personal stories, including cases of sexual assault, and staff are not trained to deal with this.
 - The impacts of staff taking leave for mental health reasons was also discussed, particularly the flow on impacts on the workload and responsibilities of remaining staff while awaiting backfilling arrangements. Members highlighted their frustration that a more proactive approach from Finance, especially for affected Electorate Office staff, was not being taken.
- Access to EAP services was crucial, however Benestar had not fully distributed contact cards to Electorate Offices. This was acknowledged by the Chair and is being followed up.
- Jillian Flinders (Director HR Policy and Assurance) advised that the application of the WHS Code of Practice on psychosocial hazards was being worked through, with an audit of risks, trends and hazards being undertaken. It was noted that data in Skytrust does not reflect the feedback from members in discussion and Ms Flinders highlighted the importance of logging psychosocial hazards via Skytrust to ensure that the Department of Finance has adequate visibility of the risks and trends, so that consideration can be given to the adequacy of controls.
- Members advised that Skytrust is not user friendly, and it was difficult to access.
- Ms Flinders highlighted that a number of learning modules available to staff via MoPS Learning which may be of assistance in relation to the matters raised:
 - Mental health First Aid
 - Accidental counsellor
 - Dealing with Conflict and Difficult behaviours
 - Constituency Management.
- Recently a ‘Refresher on Office Obligations’ was provided to Parliamentarians.
- Members noted that tailored training was required to meet the different needs of various

Electorate Offices, to acknowledge their regional and cultural needs. This can be requested via the MaPS learning team.

Action Items 1: Psychosocial hazards

- a. Initial email advice to staff regarding how to report in Skytrust to be provided in the week following the meeting.
- b. This will then be followed by a plain English tip sheet to assist staff to report psychosocial hazards via Skytrust, with appropriate feedback sought from the Committee as needed to test that it is meeting needs. (Finance)
- c. Email advice to all staff to be provided about the supports available, to also be provided in the week following the meeting (Finance).
- d. CPSU offered to meet regarding (generic) issues raised with the union (Jill Flinders to arrange).

Action Item 2: Benestar client service

- HR Advice and Support to follow up with Benestar regarding inappropriate client service and handling complaints.

Agenda Item 3 – WHS Quarterly Report

- Caroline Fazekas, from Marsh Emergency Services, noted that the Quarterly Report was not reflective of today's discussion (being for the period January-March 2023).
- Caroline noted that there had been a major reduction in reporting, but this may be due to a lack of reporting rather than a reduction in incidents. Psychosocial hazards were an area of high risk but often not reported.
- The report was taken as read by the Committee.

Given the time remaining for the meeting the Chair and Committee agreed to address the agenda in priority of issues as set out below.

Agenda Item 8 – Excessive Hours

Family Friendly Working Hours

- The Chair sought further feedback regarding this matter, prior to raising with the Usher of the Black Rod.
- Members noted that the Senate had been sitting late each night of the week, until 1am, and this was perceived as being not family friendly.
- Staff reported they are working into the evening and weekends to catch up after sitting periods.
- Members reported that Electorate Offices no longer experienced any lull in constituent and electorate business in non-sitting weeks.
- The allocation of additional Electorate Officer resources was acknowledged and greatly appreciated by members.

Action Item 3 - Family Friendly working hours (refer Action Item 8, Meeting 2)

- Chair to raise issues with the Usher of the Black Rod.

Agenda Item 7 – EO WHS measures

- Discussion about the Services Australia review underway, noting CPSU was of the view there maybe broader implications for staff dealing with members of the public. The Chair advised the Department will continue to monitor the review.
- The nature of serious security incidents, including at one MP's office, were noted.
- In discussion, Members provided feedback about security and accommodation at Electorate Offices, including:
 - Protective glass at reception
 - Response times, with feedback the redress button required to be pressed multiple times before a police response
 - The need to balance security (lack of windows in office) with a suitable office environment
 - Impacts of additional Electorate Office staff allocation where offices were at capacity or filling the role with multiple part time staff will exacerbate issues with utilisation, and
 - Utility rooms / lunch rooms being also used as IT storage.
- The Chair invited any further comments out of session and / or specific issues to be logged through Skytrust so that they can be managed appropriately.

Agenda Item 6 – WHS Review (Set the Standard r.25)

- Jill Flinders advised that the WHS review was being conducted by Deloitte and is led by the Presiding Officers and Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce (PLT) Secretariat. They are currently considering parliamentary roles and responsibilities before consulting more broadly.
- MaPS has a representative working with the Presiding Officers, PLT, Parliamentary Departments and other members.
- The Chair advised that on Monday 19 June 2023 she is attending a Working Group meeting to discuss and will seek further information on when this committee will have opportunity to input into the work.

Action Item 4 – WHS Review (Set the Standard r.25)

- HR Advice and Support to provide the Committee out of session with an update on the next steps and any mechanism to include the views of the WHSC in the Review.

Next meeting

- The Committee requested that meetings not be held during sitting weeks.
- It was also noted that Friday morning meetings after Parliamentary sittings are not suitable for regional members due to travel arrangements back to their Electorate Offices.
- It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Friday, 25 August 2023 (2-3pm) to provide lead in time for any actions prior to the sitting period.
- The Chair thanked members for their feedback during the meeting.
- The meeting closed at 15:16