

OPENING STATEMENT

Good evening and thank you Chair. My name is Michelle Wicks and I am the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service commonly known as the PWSS.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and to make a brief opening statement.

The PWSS has been a part of the Commonwealth parliamentary ecosystem for more than two years now. Established on 23 September 2021, the PWSS was a key recommendation of the *Review of the Parliamentary Workplace: responding to Serious Incidents* conducted by Ms Stephanie Foster, then Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The PWSS has moved from being established as a function of the Parliamentary Service Commissioner through a determination made by the Presiding Officers under the *Parliamentary Services Act 1999*, to an independent statutory agency established on 1 October this year through its own legislation, the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023*.

Thank you to everyone who was involved in the development and passage of the legislation.

The establishment of the PWSS as a statutory agency responds to Recommendation 11 of the *Set the Standard Report*. The legislation enables an expanded end-to-end HR function to support Parliamentarians, in their role as individual employers, and their staff.

Given the recent establishment of the expanded function and some administrative transitional issues such as migrating IT systems etc we may not be in a position to answer some questions but commit to providing the information as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Questions relating to services provided by the Department of Finance prior to transferring on 1 October will likely need to be answered by Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Division within the Department of Finance.

I understand they will be appearing before the Committee as the first group tomorrow morning.

I would now like to outline the Services of the PWSS which include:

- Learning and development
- Workplace strategy
- Workplace policy development and implementation
- HR advice
- WHS for MOPS Staff
- Trauma informed support to current and former Commonwealth workplace participants in response to serious incidents, misconduct and risks to work health and safety.
- Counselling, crisis intervention, psychoeducation, strategies to manage wellbeing through to advising individuals on how to raise concerns with their manager and vice a versa through to supported team discussion about recalibrating ways of working in an office, which we might like to refer to as a “reset” if you like.
- Support is intentionally far reaching and includes prevention, early intervention through to local resolution, mediation or workplace reviews relating to inappropriate workplace behaviour.

It's important to mention, the functions the PWSS is not responsible for include:

- Payroll
- Negotiation of the MoP(S) enterprise agreement
- Enterprise agreement related policy development
- Parliamentary Injury Compensation claims

Our service is based on independence, discretion, confidentiality and responsiveness – understanding the context within which we are working is critical to our success.

Our service principles include putting our clients at the centre of development of new offerings with a strong and essential emphasis on consultation.

We recognise there are already high expectations of the PWSS. For the Committee's awareness and noting we have been in existence as an end-to-end HR function for less than a month, we have identified the following priorities:

- Resourcing review of Parliamentarian's offices is a key early priority for us.
- Establishing a learning and development academy and reviewing our suite of L&D offerings as part of our approach to continuous improvement, to elevate the importance of building capability and to maximise participant engagement with our program.
- Establishing the PWSS Parliamentarian and MoPS Consultative Committee is another key priority and we are currently looking at how we can assist the Special Minister of State in making the rules under which the Committee will be established.
- Recruitment, including to specialist roles – eg data analytics to support PWSS reporting function. We have just finalised a bulk recruitment round which identified some possible supporting staff and are preparing to advertise specialist roles in the coming weeks.

- Analysing survey results from the client survey that we distributed to all Parliamentarians and their staff on 4 October inviting feedback on the services which the PWSS now delivers – and I encourage you all to have your say through the survey so we can ensure fit for purpose services that meet your needs.
- We will also focus on establishing all governance requirements in accordance with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and other administrative requirements necessary for a new independent agency
- And finally, bedding down the new PWSS culture.

I would like to provide some additional information in relation to two of those key priorities I have just mentioned:

The resourcing review of Parliamentarian’s offices

We very clearly understand the importance of this review to the work of the parliament and that the issue is regularly raised in both houses.

We are currently considering options to most efficiently and effectively undertake the work.

We are in the process of recruiting to an internal dedicated role to lead the work. It is anticipated that person would then have access to a panel of experts with a range of experience including, but not limited to parliamentary workplaces, innovative work practices and small and large business.

The learning and development Academy

In the last two years we have received feedback on the L&D options available and the need for consistent, formal training pathways.

Electorate office staff have, in particular, raised the need for relevant training to be made available to support the very important roles they undertake.

Therefore we are reviewing all L&D offerings with a focus on building capability for PWSS staff to deliver those offerings in-house and in remote and regional locations.

Into the future, we will investigate extending partnering approaches with universities and TAFEs to offer accredited courses that build the skills required to align with a career pathway for the staff of Parliamentarians.

I am also pleased to inform the Committee that from 1 October 2023 we have created the role of Chief People Officer. Mr Scott Mischke is the PWSS Chief People Officer and is responsible for service delivery. Mr Mischke is a very experienced HR professional with an emphasis on wellbeing and injury management. The creation of this position demonstrates the PWSS' commitment to holistic management of workplace issues and will help drive cultural change in parliamentary workplaces.

I would also like to take this opportunity to provide to the Committee the following documents:

A – PWSS Engagement map – which shows where we have undertaken outreach services and provided education sessions

B – Report on Set the Standard Recommendations for PWSS – which provides a status update on those recommendations for which the PWSS is responsible

C - The PWSS Vision and Service Principles – developed by staff of the PWSS

D – The current PWSS structure.

I'd like to finish by saying that we appreciate the service system supporting Parliamentarians and their staff has been complex and confusing. Having multiple points of contact that Parliamentarians and their teams have had to navigate to ensure their office can function well may have been overwhelming.

The complexity of a support service system that lacks coherence is amplified by the high pace, high demand and high profile nature of work for all who work in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces and we all know that when the basics don't work it makes it very difficult to deliver and sustain superior results.

I am optimistic that the new statutory PWSS with its end-to-end HR function will reduce this inherent complexity and support Parliamentarians and their teams to build effective offices and contribute to building safe and respectful workplaces across Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

Thank you - the team and I welcome questions from the Committee.