



Secretary of the Committee
Inquiry into pay parking in the Parliamentary Zone

The objective of the public service is to provide quality outcomes, which requires high levels of expertise, professionalism and frequently experience in on-ground policy application or experience from other organizations. To achieve this requires a mix of predominantly Commonwealth background staff and staff from other states; and therefore the ability to attract the latter to Canberra.

There are of course many reasons to accept an interstate move, however, Canberra does not receive many points for general location (e.g. warm climate, coastal) or for lifestyle (e.g. mention the need for decent atmosphere and coffee and people say Tilley's – sorry, but a couple of halfway decent places you have to drive across town to aren't equal to the abundant choice available in other capitals). So the job, pay and/or conditions need to be good. As the commonwealth has its own 'agency speak', my observation over the years has been that if you can get in at the same level you are doing well, although you will still be considered 'junior' at that level. However, new staff often come in at a lower level in terms of their experience or prior responsibilities. In the environmental area, that often means a pay cut not a pay rise.

So what has this to do with parking?

Well, strange as it may seem, one of the big attractions of working in the parliamentary triangle is the free car parking. Most staff can get to work within 15-30 minutes by car, and as long as you get there early, get a park. The travel time is also worthy of consideration – much better than say Sydney or Melbourne. However, it does not compare with, for instance, Adelaide, Hobart etc, and even Brisbane is much more accessible; especially if the cost of house prices is thrown into the equations. For instance, I have just sold a 4 bedroom, fully renovated/landscaped house with pool for \$310,000 that was under 8 km and less than 15 minutes drive in peak hour (freeway) to work in the center of Brisbane (and similar in Geelong, Vic etc). That equivalent proximity, house quality and cost does not exist in Canberra. The cost of car parking and its ease (if you get to work before 8.40 am, after which it is chaotic due to insufficient parking) then is an important job consideration.

The down side of the parliamentary triangle for all staff in the area is the total lack of access to services and facilities (which I find quite bizarre!). Even if public transport was more cost and time efficient in Canberra than it is, it is imperative if you are a contributing household member to have a car a couple of times a week – to buy gifts, pay bills, visit doctors, companies etc and do extra shopping on the way home or at lunchtime – not that you'll find a park within several blocks on your return if you go out at lunchtime (which means infrastructure costs upfront will be required if introducing pay parking). The lack of access to services and facilities is also relevant when attempting to encourage people to use some public transport – maybe 2-3 times a week. They just won't do it if they have access to weekly-annual car parking tickets. The other alternative—access to only daily car parking tickets—is an enormous annual cost to staff and not a scenario commercial car parking operators (in any state I'm aware of) would

operate under. If only daily parking tickets are available, the outcome will presumably affect salaries and/or the quality of staff the government seeks to attract and retain. The rising price of housing, and the likelihood of this continuing, has already had a significant impact on the viability of Canberra compared with most regions (except central Melbourne and Sydney) as a place to work and reside for an equivalent salary. Please do not make it less viable.

Anne Withell

Still residing 'temporarily' with friends & relatives but getting a bit tired after 4 months of house hunting with their escalating prices