

Dear Tribunal Members

First, can I say that the options paper makes the best case that can be made for increases in key areas, and it contains a helpful collection of information.

Our members and their community

I know the Tribunal will not allow itself to be dictated to by majority views, but there can be little likelihood that the general community would support other than modest increases. It is also possible that apart from the Northern Territory and to a lesser extent Tasmania, the people of the ACT probably have the best opportunity to observe their members at close hand. We know that most – indeed I think all - of the current membership are reasonable and decent people. Perceptions would vary but, I suggest, probably the great majority of those of us who have had dealings with current our MPs have found them polite, helpful and conscientious. To generalise, in my view in fact they do their best for us, and I suggest also that they are seen to do their best for us.

A relevant point however is that the ACT seems to be blessed with a high number of community and other organisations and with many very alert and articulate citizens – in this we are perhaps much less dependent than some other communities on our members to raise and publicise grievances, right wrongs etc.

Ms Cahill Lambert was of course correct to point out that the local members had not sought increases (letter in Canberra Times). My thought is that they know their community and know what it expects and will think reasonable. They will also be acutely aware of the community concerns about the possibility of the size of the Assembly being increased.

Comparisons

My observation is that there are some very able and decent people in the Assembly. They have taken on the role and found it fulfilling and for some demanding – and like all jobs theirs would have their negatives. The salaries are lower than for many senior and demanding positions – but also much higher than those of most of the community.

It is true that the arrangements here see members involved in a broader range of issues but apart from the Ministers and the Leader of the Opposition they have considerable discretion in the extent to which they do in fact get involved in a substantive way in the range of matters open to them. This reality is one of the reasons comparisons to senior executive remuneration and benefits need to be treated with caution.

A regular point is the comparison with members of other Australian parliaments. One of the great arguments is that higher salaries and benefits attract a better standard of candidate or at least do not deter good candidates – one only has to look at certain jurisdictions to question any link between benefit levels and the quality of members. Further, on an international perspective, Australian federal Members are pretty well remunerated – see paper published by the British Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. The relevance of this point is that federal benefits and entitlements have been used either formally or informally as reference points for state and territory members' entitlements.

Finally can I say that I thought the submissions of Mr Willheim, Mr Burmester and Mr Dale made some reasonable points.

My own conclusion is that the most modest increase would be the preferred one and the one most likely to be acceptable to the community – a community in which after all many self-employed and small business people have seen their incomes fall or disappear.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

(Name withheld)