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Tribunal Secretariat
Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal
Email: enquiries@remunerationtribunal.vic.gov.au

Dear Tribunal Secretariat

Submission from Australian Greens Victoria Members of Parliament

I wish to make the following submission on behalf of the Members of Parliament from the Australian Greens Victoria for consideration in your next determination of salaries and allowances provided to Members of Parliament (MPs) in Victoria.

1. Salary cap of 1.5% for Members of Parliament

The Australian Greens Victoria MPs propose that if the Tribunal was considering increasing MP salaries, any increase should not exceed 1.5% given our generous base salary and the public sector wage cap that the Victorian Government has imposed on the rest of the Victorian Public Service. No more than a 1.5% wage increase is appropriate and is consistent with the Victorian Government's current wages policy and enterprise bargaining framework. We believe it is unnecessary and inequitable for members of parliament to receive wage increases in excess of those being offered by the government to other public sector workers.

2. Electorate Allowance and Electorate Office and Communications Budget

In previous submissions to the Tribunal, we have outlined how the work of cross-bench MPs differs from that of Government and Opposition MPs. Notably, that the structures to support the work of Members of Parliament, including staffing and the system of remuneration and entitlements, are designed around the assumption of a two-party system.

The current system treats all MPs who are not Ministers or Shadow Ministers as being in one category equivalent to government or opposition backbenchers. However, the reality of the Victorian Parliament is that these categories do not reflect the role, workload and functions of our work or that of the significant number of Victorian MPs on the cross-bench.

Our experience is that we operate more like the opposition shadow cabinet, with shared portfolio responsibilities on top of general representative and local constituent work. We are required to be across all legislation and other parliamentary business, develop positions on matters within all portfolios, as well as meeting the needs of our tens of thousands of constituents engaging with our electorates and constituencies on what we stand for, what we are doing and how it affects them.

To give you an idea, MPs are given 2.5 EFT staff to cover all their work. As Greens MPs we tend to structure our offices so that we have a role that focuses on managing the office and responding to constituents as well as managing the MPs diary, local events and relationships

with community groups and all correspondence received by the office; a role focused on supporting all our parliament and policy work; and a role focused on communicating our work to the electorate.

Communications is becoming a more intense job in the digital age including needing to monitor and respond to several social media platforms, manage posts and responses, especially now we are often held accountable for ensuring comments on our social media by other people are not defamatory or abusive.

Each of these roles is at least one full time job if not much more - yet we are required to fit them into 2.5 EFT so we need to rely on part-time staff or on significantly utilising the Electorate Office and Communications (EOC) budget to engage additional staff. This is further problematic because such staff can only be employed on a casual basis.

While there has been evidence out of IBAC about electorate office staffing entitlements being misused by some members this is not a reflection of the work that is actually done in a functioning committed local MP's office, particularly the cross-bench.

While we appreciate you have not requested submissions on the structure of the staffing and entitlements we believe this provides important context for your decision-making especially because it relates to significant pressures on our limited EOCB allocation.

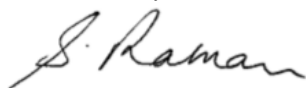
In relation to the Electorate Allowance and Electorate and Office Communications Budgets, we primarily use these budgets to communicate with our constituents both online and offline. However, it also needs to be used to cover additional staffing needs, security and servicing of the office, buying office equipment, other local constituent costs, local and online advertising, phone bills and other administrative costs.

We note the increases in postage costs, in particular, as well as general inflationary pressures mean the existing EOCB and EA are reducing in value. For example the EOCB can now only provide for one (maximum) addressed mail to the electorate per year. It generally costs around \$50,000 or more to send one very simple letter/piece of mail to every household (not even every constituent) in one lower-house electorate. This means we're required to spend roughly a third, if not more, of our entire combined annual EOCB/EA budget just sending one letter to each household in our electorate, before we even factor in additional staffing needs, costs to run our office, other community needs and everything else we need to cover from these budgets. It is becoming increasingly difficult to effectively communicate with our constituents about our work on the budgets supplied. Our constituents expect to hear more regularly from us as their elected representatives, and we regularly hear this from people in our communities.

We request you consider the extent to which the EA and EOCB are being reduced in value, particularly in respect of providing the means for effective communication with constituents and adequately cover staffing needs, particularly of cross-bench MPs

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Ratnam MLC
Leader of the Victorian Greens