



Australian Government

**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review

The Hon David Littleproud MP

Leader of the National Party

Travel to the Gold Coast in February 2023

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Executive summary

Assurance review findings

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an assurance review of Commonwealth-funded travel and travel-related expenses for the Hon David Littleproud MP, Leader of the Nationals.
2. The assurance review consisted of one travel itinerary for the period 9 to 12 February 2023, containing a return flight between Canberra and the Gold Coast, and one COMCAR trip to the Gold Coast airport.
3. Following contact from IPEA, Mr Littleproud's office first sought formal advice, then requested invoices for the relevant travel expenses and repaid the amount of \$2,009.76.
4. IPEA has concluded that parliamentary business was not the dominant purpose of Mr Littleproud's travel from Canberra to the Gold Coast on 9 February 2023. This represents a contravention of section 26 of the PBR Act.
5. IPEA finds that Mr Littleproud's return travel to Canberra for a parliamentary sitting, on 12 February 2023 was consistent with the legislative framework.
6. Mr Littleproud voluntarily repaid all the travel and travel-related expenses in scope of this assurance review, a total amount of \$2,009.76, including the expenses found to be consistent with the legislative framework.

Scope and purpose

7. This assurance review assessed Mr Littleproud's use of Commonwealth-funded travel and travel-related expenses to undertake travel to, from and within the Gold Coast from 9 to 12 February 2023.
8. There were no family travel expenses used for the relevant period.
9. The purpose of this assurance review was to determine whether Mr Littleproud's use of parliamentary business resources during the relevant period was consistent with the legislative framework.

Engagement with Mr Littleproud

10. On 1 March 2023, IPEA wrote to Mr Littleproud with a series of questions in relation to his travel, inquiring about the dominant purpose of his travel, and the nature of his parliamentary business during the period in scope (**Attachment 1**). Mr Littleproud was given a deadline of 15 March 2023 for his response.
11. On 6 March 2023, a staff member from Mr Littleproud's office contacted IPEA Advice to seek advice and request invoices for the relevant travel expenses, as he wanted to voluntarily repay the expenses.
12. On 7 March 2023, IPEA responded to Mr Littleproud by email, providing the requested advice.

13. On 15 March 2023:

- IPEA Advice and COMCAR provided the requested invoices for the relevant travel expenses.
- Mr Littleproud's office also contacted IPEA Assurance to request an extension to the response date. An extension was granted, with the response due close of business (COB) Friday 24 March 2023.

14. On 24 March 2023, Mr Littleproud's office contacted IPEA to request another extension to the response deadline. A further extension was granted, with the response due COB Friday 31 March 2023.

15. IPEA received a response from Mr Littleproud's office on 31 March 2023 (**Attachment 2**).

Audit and Assurance function

IPEA's statutory audit function

16. Subsection 12(1) of the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* (IPEA Act) empowers IPEA to monitor, audit and prepare regular reports on parliamentarians' work and travel resources.

Responsibilities of members of parliament

17. Parliamentarians have a responsibility to understand the legal framework in which they are operating. Parliamentarians and staff can seek IPEA advice and attend or request information sessions to assist them in this understanding.

Legislative framework

18. IPEA applied the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act) and its associated instruments as the relevant legislation for this assurance review. The PBR Act is a principles-based framework that requires parliamentarians to ensure expenditure is incurred for the 'dominant purpose' of conducting parliamentary business and in a manner that represents 'value for money'. The legislation provides a definition of parliamentary business that includes 'parliamentary duties, electorate duties, party political duties and official duties'.

19. The key instruments relevant to this Assurance Review are:

- *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act)
 - Section 6(1) and (2)
 - Section 25(3)
 - Section 27
- Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (the Regulations)
 - Section 4
- Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017
- Parliamentary Business Resources (Commonwealth Transport) Determination 2017

20. Obligations: The principles-based legislative framework imposes a number of obligations upon parliamentarians in relation to their use of public resources. In summary, parliamentarians are personally responsible and accountable for their use of public resources. They must be prepared to publicly justify their use of public resources for conducting their parliamentary business, and must act ethically and in good faith in using, and accounting for the use of, those resources.
21. Parliamentarians are not able to claim public resources, including the work expenses prescribed in the Regulations, unless their travel:
- is for the dominant purpose of conducting their parliamentary business;
 - represents value for money; and
 - meets the relevant conditions connected to the travel claim or expense.
22. 'Parliamentary business' has the meaning given by section 6 of the PBR Act. Activities that fall within the four duty streams of parliamentary business are set out in the *Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017* as 'parliamentary duties', 'electorate duties', 'party political duties' and 'official duties'.
23. Further, section 6 of the PBR Act defines:
- (2) *However, an activity is not the **parliamentary business** of a member if:*
- (a) *the member carries it out for the dominant purpose of either or both of the following:*
- (i) *providing a personal benefit to the member or another person;*
- (ii) *pursuing commercial purposes of the member or another person; or*
- (b) *the activity is determined under subsection (3) for the purposes of this paragraph.*
24. The legislative framework is based upon the recommendations of the 2016 review: *An Independent Parliamentary Entitlement System*. This Review set out principles that should guide parliamentarians' decision making on work expenses. In particular, the Review noted:

Good faith

Parliamentarians are to act in good faith in making decisions about whether expenditure is incurred for the dominant purpose of conducting parliamentary business, and represents value for money. In particular, parliamentarians must not seek to disguise as 'parliamentary business' an activity whose dominant purpose is personal or commercial.

Assurance review methodology

Background

25. Mr Littleproud's electorate offices are in:
- Dalby, Queensland
 - Warwick, Queensland
 - Roma, Queensland
26. His nominated home base is in Ryeford, Queensland.

27. On 17 February 2023, *The Australian* published an article detailing Mr Littleproud's purchase of a beachfront apartment on the Gold Coast. On 25 February 2023, a second article appeared in *The Guardian*, querying the possible inappropriate use of parliamentary work expenses in relation to Mr Littleproud's private purchase. These articles can be found at **Attachment 3**.
28. In accordance with IPEA's protocol on dealing with possible misuse of parliamentary work expenses, a preliminary assessment into Mr Littleproud's travel to the Gold Coast commenced on 23 February 2023.

Scope of assurance review

29. This assurance review assessed whether Mr Littleproud's use of parliamentary business resources to undertake travel to, from and within the Gold Coast from 9 to 12 February 2023, was consistent with the legislative framework.

Method

30. IPEA gathered data from its internal and external sources for all of Mr Littleproud's travel during the period in scope. IPEA identified four travel expenses that were within scope and required further examination to determine whether they were consistent with the relevant legislative framework.
31. IPEA conducted the assurance review by examining and assessing:
 - direct communication with, and information provided by, Mr Littleproud
 - publicly available material;
 - internal records held by IPEA and COMCAR

Assessment of work expenses

Summary of findings

Analysis

32. Travel details for Mr Littleproud were obtained using the IPEA Admin Dashboard.
33. COMCAR travel for Mr Littleproud was requested from COMCAR.
34. Analysis of the data revealed that Mr Littleproud used parliamentarians' travel expenses to fly from Canberra to the Gold Coast via Sydney on Friday 9 February 2023, and from the Gold Coast to Canberra on 12 February 2023.
35. Mr Littleproud also travelled from Surfers Paradise to the Gold Coast airport using COMCAR on 12 February 2023.
36. On 1 March 2023, IPEA wrote to Mr Littleproud with a series of questions in relation to his travel, inquiring about the dominant purpose of his travel, and the nature of his parliamentary business during the period in scope (**Attachment 1**). A deadline of 15 March 2023 was given for his response.

37. On 6 March 2023, a staff member from Mr Littleproud's office contacted IPEA to seek formal advice in relation to where to find information about a parliamentarian returning home in the legislation. The staff member also requested invoices for the relevant travel expenses, as he wanted to voluntarily repay the expenses. This request occurred within 28 days of the expense use.
38. On 7 March 2023, IPEA responded to Mr Littleproud's email providing the requested formal advice.
39. On 15 March 2023:
 - IPEA Advice and COMCAR provided the requested invoices for the relevant travel expenses.
 - Mr Littleproud's office also contacted IPEA Assurance to request an extension to the response date. An extension was granted, with the response due close of business (COB) Friday 24 March 2023.
40. IPEA notes that the COMCAR expense amount originally provided to IPEA was a quote only as the amount was not finalised by the third-party provider. The final amount charged to COMCAR was \$79.20, which was reflected in the final invoice provided to Mr Littleproud.
41. On 24 March 2023, Mr Littleproud's office contacted IPEA to request an extension to the response date. A further extension was granted, with the response due COB Friday 31 March 2023.
42. On 31 March, the office of Mr Littleproud responded to IPEA (**Attachment 2**). The office advised that:

"In order to remove any uncertainty regarding this travel, please be advised that all costs incurred for the travel over the period of the 9th February to the 12th February have been paid by Mr Littleproud. Please find attached invoices and receipts for these payments. Therefore, the travel expenses outlined in Attachment A of your letter (dated 1st March 2023) are no longer Commonwealth funded travel."
43. In his response, Mr Littleproud did not answer the questions asked by IPEA in relation to his travel for the relevant period (**Attachment 1**). Specifically, he did not provide any details of the dominant purpose of his travel, or the nature of his parliamentary business in the Gold Coast.
44. From the information publicly available, including public statements made by Mr Littleproud, IPEA has concluded that parliamentary business was not the dominant purpose of his travel from Canberra to the Gold Coast on 9 February 2023. This represents a contravention of section 26 of the PBR Act.
45. The COMCAR to the Gold Coast airport and flight from the Gold Coast to Canberra on Sunday 12 February 2023 were for the purpose of transporting Mr Littleproud to attend parliament. Such travel constitutes parliamentary business and IPEA finds that these expenses are consistent with the legislative framework. IPEA notes that although not required to, Mr Littleproud voluntarily repaid these expenses.
46. The receipts provided by the office in the response of 31 March 2023 confirm that Mr Littleproud had repaid all the travel expenses in scope, including the expenses found to be consistent with the legislative framework. The total amount repaid for all travel expenses within scope of this assurance review was \$2,009.76.

Conclusion

47. IPEA has concluded that parliamentary business was not the dominant purpose of Mr Littleproud's travel from Canberra to the Gold Coast on 9 February 2023. This represents a contravention of section 26 of the PBR Act.
48. IPEA finds that Mr Littleproud's return travel to Canberra for a parliamentary sitting, on 12 February 2023 was not inconsistent with the legislative framework.
49. Mr Littleproud voluntarily repaid all the travel and travel-related expenses in scope of this assurance review, a total amount of \$2,009.76, including the expenses found to be consistent with the legislative framework.
50. IPEA is satisfied that this assurance review does not require further action. IPEA notes that as a result of the engagement, Mr Littleproud's office has sought advice and received further information and assistance on the use of travel and travel-related expenses.



Australian Government
Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority

1 March 2023

Hon David Littleproud MP
Leader of the Nationals
Member for Maranoa
T40-42, Dalby Shopping World
17-67 Cunningham Street
Dalby, QLD, 4405

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Littleproud

Assurance Review of travel expenses

The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) has a responsibility under the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* to review work expenses accessed by parliamentarians.

IPEA is undertaking an Assurance Review of Commonwealth-funded travel expenses incurred by you in relation to travel between Canberra and the Gold Coast on 9 February 2023, COMCAR use within the Gold Coast on 12 February 2023, and a return flight from the Gold Coast to Canberra on 12 February 2023 (the relevant period). Please note that IPEA publishes its assurance reviews on its website at www.ipea.gov.au.

Attachment A details your Commonwealth-funded travel within the relevant period. We have set out questions for your response to assist in our review.

Section 6 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (the PBR Act) and the Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017 define the four streams of parliamentary business. These are parliamentary duties, electorate duties, party political duties and official duties.

Section 6 of the PBR Act also states:

“However, an activity is not the parliamentary business of a member if:

- (a) the member carries it out for the dominant purpose of either or both of the following:
 - (i) providing a personal benefit to the member or another person;*
 - (ii) pursuing commercial purposes of the member or another person; or**
- (b) the activity is determined under subsection (3) for the purposes of this paragraph.”*

The principles parliamentarians are to apply when utilising public resources are set out in part 3 - division 2 of the PBR Act.

As you would be aware, under the principles-based scheme parliamentarians have an obligation to be prepared to publicly justify their use of public resources for conducting their parliamentary business (section 25(3) of the PBR Act). Parliamentarians also have an obligation to ensure that expenses that are incurred, or allowances or other public resources that are claimed, in relation to the conduct of the member's parliamentary business provide value for money, taking into account the need to conduct the member's parliamentary business (section 27 of the PBR Act).

Please review the attached list of expenses and provide a written response to the questions via email to assurance@ipea.gov.au, by close of business on **15 March 2023**, or advise us prior to the date if you need more time.

Should you wish to discuss this matter, please contact me on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Nicole Pearson
Branch Manager, Transparency, Assurance & Legal
Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority
One Canberra Avenue, FORREST ACT 2603

Attachment A

Hon David Littleproud MP

Assurance Review of travel expenses

Work Expense	Departure Location	Departure Date	Departure Time	Arrival Location	Arrival Date	Arrival Time	Amount (GST excl.)
Travel Fares – QANTAS	Canberra	09/02/2023	4:10 PM	Sydney	09/02/2023	5:05 PM	\$494.13
Travel Fares – QANTAS	Sydney	09/02/2023	7:25 PM	Gold Coast	09/02/2023	7:50 PM	\$710.51
COMCAR	Surfers Paradise	12/02/2023	10:00 AM	Bilinga	12/02/2023	11:23 AM	\$169.32
Travel Fares – QANTAS	Gold Coast	12/02/2023	11:45 AM	Canberra	12/02/2023	2:25 PM	\$550.40

1. What was the dominant purpose of your travel to the Gold Coast from 9 to 12 February 2023?
2. With reference to the definition given by section 6 of the PBR Act, what was the nature of your parliamentary business in the Gold Coast from 9 to 12 February 2023? Please provide copies of documentation to support your response, such as diary notes, invitations or media reporting.
3. Taking into consideration Section 2 of the PBR Act, did your travel for the relevant period result in a personal gain or involve the pursuit of commercial purposes?

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 31 March 2023 2:38 PM
To: Assurance
Subject: Mr Littleproud travel response
Attachments: Receipt - \$1,325.11.pdf; COMCAR Invoice 2800049440.pdf; Receipt - 2800049440.pdf; Hon David Littleproud MP - 20060008.pdf; Receipt - \$605.45.pdf; Hon David Littleproud MP - 20059214.pdf

Dear Ms Pearson,

I write on behalf of the Leader of The Nationals and Member for Maranoa the Hon David Littleproud MP in response to travel expenses incurred over the period of the 9th February to the 12th February.

In order to remove any uncertainty regarding this travel, please be advised that all costs incurred for the travel over the period of the 9th February to the 12th February have been paid by Mr Littleproud. Please find attached invoices and receipts for these payments.

Therefore, the travel expenses outlined in Attachment A of your letter (dated 1st March 2023) are no longer Commonwealth funded travel.

Please note that in Attachment A the COMCAR cost amount is listed as \$169.32, however the invoice raised from COMCAR for this trip was \$79.20. It would be appreciated if you could please review this difference and let me know if further action is required on our part.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you require any further information or clarification.

Thank you for your time and I apologise for any inconvenience.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Chief of Staff
Office of the Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Agriculture

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TAX INVOICE

Invoice To:

Mr. David Littleproud MP
 Parliament House
 PO BOX 6022

DALBY QLD 4405

Invoice Date: 15.03.2023
Phone number: (02) 6215 3000
Invoice Reference: [REDACTED]
Payment Reference: [REDACTED]
Customer No: [REDACTED]
Payment Due Date: 14.04.2023
Email: [REDACTED]

On any correspondence,
 please quote the Invoice Reference.

Please pay within 30 days of the invoice date

Item Description	Net Amount	GST Amount	Total Amount
001 *Recovery of Airfare 12 Feb 23	\$550.41	\$55.04	\$605.45

Total: \$550.41 \$55.04 \$605.45

1. Payment by Direct Debit
 IPEA Administered Receipts A/C

2. Mailing your payment

All cheques and money orders should be made payable to the IPEA.
 Mail payment together with this stub to:

IPEA
 1 Canberra Avenue FORREST, ACT, 2603

3. Payment by Credit Card

Complete the following and return by email to finance@ipea.gov.au or contact the IPEA Help Desk on (02) 6215 3000 with your credit card details.

Card Type: Mastercard Visa

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: _____ CCV _____

Name of Card Holder: _____ Signature: _____

Payment Amount: _____ Date: _____ Payment Ref: 3100002281



IPEA
1 CANBERRA AVENUE
FORREST ACT 2603
MID: 0
TID: 01822010101
Version: 0.10.27B

=====
22/03/23 14:26
BATCH: 000004
INV: 3
STAN: 000021
ACCOUNT TYPE CREDIT

██████████

SALE AUD \$605.45

APPROVED 08
APPROVAL CODE R54368
CUSTOMER COPY

THANK YOU FOR
YOUR CUSTOM

PLEASE RETAIN RECEIPT
FOR YOUR RECORDS



Australian Government
Department of Finance

Receipt

1 Canberra Avenue
FORREST, ACT, 2603

[REDACTED]

Page 1 of 1

The Hon David Littleproud
Electoral Office
T40-42, Dalby Shopping World
17-67 Cunningham Street
Dalby QLD 4405

Date of Issue: 28/03/2023
Receipt No: 1400008032
Customer Account No: [REDACTED]

Account Enquiries
Email: [REDACTED]
Phone No: [REDACTED]
Fax No: [REDACTED]

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for your recent payment of \$79.20
for the invoice(s) listed below.

Our Ref.	Description of Supply	Invoice Date	Currency	Amount
2800049440	COMCAR Trip 179643 12/02/2023	15.03.2023	AUD	79.20

Total AUD \$79.20

AUTHORITY

This is an Electronic document generated by Warren Trethewey on 28/03/2023 and as such does not require a physical signature. Please direct enquiries to the contact numbers shown above.



IPEA
1 CANBERRA AVENUE
FORREST ACT 2603
MID: 0
TID: 01822010101
Version: 0.10.27B

15/03/23	16:08
BATCH:	000002
INV:	1
STAN:	000010
ACCOUNT TYPE	CREDIT

SALE AUD \$1325.11

APPROVED	08
APPROVAL CODE	R97993

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THANK YOU FOR
YOUR CUSTOM

PLEASE RETAIN RECEIPT
FOR YOUR RECORDS



TAX INVOICE

Invoice To:

Mr. David Littleproud MP
Parliament House
PO BOX 6022

DALBY QLD 4405

Invoice Date: 14.03.2023
Phone number: (02) 6215 3000
Invoice Reference: [REDACTED]
Payment Reference: [REDACTED]
Customer No: [REDACTED]
Payment Due Date: 13.04.2023
Email: [REDACTED]

On any correspondence,
please quote the Invoice Reference.

Please pay within 30 days of the invoice date

Item Description	Net Amount	GST Amount	Total Amount
001 *Recovery of Airfare 9 Feb 23	\$710.51	\$71.05	\$781.56
002 *Recovery of Airfare 9 Feb 23	\$494.13	\$49.42	\$543.55

Total: \$1,204.64 \$120.47 \$1,325.11

Page: 1 of 1

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IPEA Administered Receipts A/C

2. Mailing your payment

All cheques and money orders should be made payable to the IPEA.
Mail payment together with this stub to:

IPEA
1 Canberra Avenue FORREST, ACT, 2603

3. Payment by Credit Card

Complete the following and return by email to finance@ipea.gov.au or contact the IPEA Help Desk on (02) 6215 3000 with your credit card details.

Card Type: Mastercard Visa

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: _____ CCV _____

Name of Card Holder: _____ Signature: _____

Payment Amount: _____ Date: _____ Payment Ref: 3100002279



ABN [REDACTED]

TAX INVOICE

Invoice To:

The Hon David Littleproud
 Electoral Office
 T40-42, Dalby Shopping World
 17-67 Cunningham Street
 Dalby QLD 4405

Document Date:	15.03.2023
Contact officer:	[REDACTED]
Phone number:	[REDACTED]
Fax number:	[REDACTED]
Payment Reference:	[REDACTED]
Customer No:	[REDACTED]
Payment Due Date:	04.04.2023
On any correspondence, please quote: [REDACTED]	

Payment is required by the due date above, otherwise interest may be charged on any overdue amounts. If this invoice is not paid by the due date it may be referred to a debt collection agency.

Item Description	Net Amount	GST Amount	Total Amount
001 COMCAR Trip 179643 12/02/2023	\$72.00	\$7.20	\$79.20

Total Supply: \$72.00 \$7.20 \$79.20

1. Payment by Direct Debit

Please send remittance to accountsreceivable@sdo.gov.au
 M&PS ADMIN RECEIPTS A/C

2. Mailing your payment

All cheques and money orders should be made payable to the Department of Finance.

Mail payment together with this stub to:

Department of Finance
 1 Canberra Avenue FORREST, ACT, 2603

3. Payment by Credit Card

Complete the following and return by mail or fax to (02) [REDACTED]

Card Type: Mastercard Visa American Express

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: _____

Name of Card Holder: _____ Signature: _____

Pmnt Amt: _____ Date: _____ Cust Ref: [REDACTED]

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More sloppy paperwork from Labor MP Andrew Charlton; Brittany Higgins' fiance David Sharaz quits radio job;



Charlton, a bazillionaire, will be ironically leaning into the grilling of Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe today. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Martin Ollman

By YONI BASHAN
MARGIN CALL EDITOR
Follow @yoni_bashan

and CHRISTINE LACY
SENIOR REPORTER, MARGIN CALL COLUMNIST

9:32AM FEBRUARY 17, 2023

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THE AUSTRALIAN



Labor MP **Andrew Charlton** just can't help being sloppy with his paperwork – again. Aren't economists supposed to be extremely geeky about details?

First, he mucked up his electoral forms while running as a candidate for Parramatta, claiming to live at an address some time after moving out.

Now, a gander at his political disclosures suggests he's done it again, omitting a slew of interests held by his barrister wife, **Phoebe Arcus**.

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Arcus is a director and shareholder of two family companies, Bootle Pty Ltd and Fogo Pty Ltd. Then there's her shareholdings in a third family company named Kiveeno Pty Ltd. At least one of them is probably a superannuation trustee.



Andrew Charlton MP at North Parramatta.

Omitted, too, is Arcus's interest in 5 Wentworth Pty Ltd, the legal chamber where she plies her trade as a barrister.

No word of reply from Charlton when Margin Call came knocking for an explanation. At a minimum he might want to consider the always-comical **Paul Fletcher** response. For years Fletch has been claiming on paper not to know any of his wife's additional holdings or interests – because he never asks her. It's certainly one way to avoid any inconvenience – keep your head in the sand!

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Meanwhile there's a mild sense of irony that Charlton, a bazillionaire, will be leaning into the grilling of Reserve Bank governor **Philip Lowe** on Friday when he's queried, presumably, on the small issue of the nation's monetary settings.

Ironic because Charlton is a guy with a \$16m mansion in Bellevue Hill unencumbered by any mortgage and a \$2m property in North Parramatta, purchased outright a few months ago, renting for about \$750 per week.

Not that we're knocking his success, but Charlton is hardly pinching pennies either. The best advice he might receive from his minders is to stay in his economic lane.

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Out of office

David Sharaz, the partner of former government staffer **Brittany Higgins**, resigned from his role with regional television and radio owner Southern Cross Austereo on Thursday, just two weeks after receiving a defamation notice from Liberal senator **Linda Reynolds**.

An otherwise forgettable item of news – first reported by Margin Call, admittedly – the story received an expected breath of life during the afternoon when Higgins took to Instagram posting a strident defence of Sharaz.

That was after the Daily Mail published a parasitic article thinly implying that Sharaz quit his job in proximity to Higgins' workplace settlement with the commonwealth, landing her a reported amount of \$3m.

As some wags rudely pointed out, with that kind of money, why bother continuing to work at all?

“What a hit job,” Higgins wrote. “No one walks away from employment without a job to walk into. David has been nothing but a supportive partner in an incredibly difficult time. Read between the lines.”



Liberal senator Linda Reynolds. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Martin Ollman

Between the lines? Well he has no other job to speak of – that much Margin Call has been able to confirm – so Higgins is clearly whisper-shouting that Sharaz was helped to the exit by SCA management. Sharaz, of course, declined to comment when contacted and an SCA spokeswoman begrudgingly handed over some lines confirming only that the resignation occurred. We hear it was all inked on mutual terms.

If there has been a change of heart by SCA management towards Sharaz, then it

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their Queensland head of news operations, who required time off work on several occasions.

Those absences were mainly to accompany Higgins to the criminal trial of her alleged assailant, **Bruce Lehrmann**, but also to participate in an internal investigation of staffer skulduggery, peripheral to the Higgins matter, ordered by the Morrison government.

An explanation for the souring of relations with SCA might combine his growing public profile, his prolific tweeting, and the surfacing of a defamation complaint brought by Reynolds last month against him. SCA management, naturally, would wonder what implications this would all carry for the brand.

The senator's lawyers have accused Sharaz of defaming her in two tweets published in January and December of last year, the content of which, they claim, held imputations that she bullied Higgins, interfered with the police investigation into her 2019 sexual assault, and that she leaked privileged material concerning Higgins' compensation claim.

Littleproud owner

Meanwhile, Nationals leader **David Littleproud** doesn't seem to fear any further ratcheting-up of interest rates after free diving into the Queensland property market.

He's purchased a beachfront apartment on the Gold Coast with partner **Amelia Dobson**, forking out \$1.375m and settling in February. Perhaps it was just a coincidence that he waited until Valentine's Day to reveal the investment.

It's mortgaged with the Commonwealth Bank, of course, where Dobson happens to hold an executive role.

Sayers' new recruit

A plum hire over at Melbourne investment advisory Sayers Group, which has scooped up **Jaala Pulford** mere months after she retired from Victorian politics.

The former Andrews government minister served for 16 years before calling time in October during a cabinet exodus, one that saw off **James Merlino**, **Martin Foley**, **Lisa Neville** and **Martin Pakula**.





Former Victorian minister Jaala Pulford. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Nicki Connolly

Given that **Dan Andrews** went on to win the November 26 election, Pulford's recruitment could be regarded as a savvy tactical play owing to her healthy relationships with not only the refreshed Andrews ministry but also federal Labor figures in the Albanese government.

Not that **Luke Sayers**, the Carlton president and chairman of Sayers Group, doesn't have suction at the state and federal level himself; Andrews was a noted attendee at Sayers' 50th birthday party some years ago and was said to have been one of the last to leave.

Pulford's appointment, which has already begun, follows a separate announcement this month of her recruitment to the board of the Children's Cancer Foundation.

YONI BASHAN, MARGIN CALL EDITOR

Yoni Bashan is the editor of the agenda-setting column Margin Call. He began his career at The Sunday Telegraph and has won multiple awards for crime writing and specialist investigations. In 2014 he was seconded o... [Read more](#)



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Australia news

Parliamentary travel rules under scrutiny after Gold Coast trip by Nationals leader

While David Littleproud's taxpayer-funded flight falls within parliamentary guidelines, the Gold Coast apartment he settled on three days prior to the flight has reignited discussion over defining official MP travel expenditure

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Paul Karp

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Sat 25 Feb 2023 01:00 AEDT

In early February 2023, Nationals leader, [David Littleproud](#), left parliament early to travel to the Gold Coast, three days after he and his spouse settled on a new apartment there.

Littleproud, whose electorate of Maranoa is in south west [Queensland](#), took leave shortly before parliament had finished for the week, departing Canberra for a family commitment on Thursday 9 February.

Independent Parliamentary Expense Authority (IPEA) guidelines allow MPs to return to anywhere in their home state from a parliamentary sitting, to be with their

families.

Littleproud's trip was three days after settling on the \$1.375m beachfront apartment in Surfers Paradise. He told Guardian Australia that his "return to family in Queensland was within both the spirit and intent of IPEArules".

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The member for Maranoa disclosed the property purchase on his register of interests on 13 February. Guardian Australia understands the business class flight was publicly funded. Guardian Australia does not suggest that the travel constituted a breach of expenditure rules.

In 2017, then health minister and now deputy Liberal leader, Sussan Ley, **[purchased a Gold Coast apartment](#)** on a taxpayer-funded trip, prompting a major overhaul of parliamentary expenses, despite the trip being deemed within the rules.

The new rules contain obligations to "act ethically and in good faith" and require MPs to be "personally responsible and accountable for their use of public resources" and that they "must consider how the public would perceive their use of those resources".

The Nationals leader labelled "attempts to make this appear unethical" as "pathetic and misleading", also rejecting the suggestion the trip was undertaken "to take possession of a property".

According to a land title search, Littleproud and his partner settled on a two bedroom apartment on the Esplanade on Monday 6 February, the first day of a two-week parliamentary sitting fortnight.

On 9 February, Littleproud appears to have left his seat in question time shortly after 3pm. His absence was noticed by colleagues when the prime minister, Anthony Albanese, and the opposition leader, Peter Dutton, delivered valedictory speeches shortly before 4pm for Liberal MP, Alan Tudge, **[who had just announced his retirement](#)**.

Parliament did not sit the following day.

The Nationals whip, Mark Coulton, said that Littleproud was away and had leave for the early departure.

Littleproud flew to the Gold Coast via Sydney on a flight shortly after 4pm, before the house adjourned at 5pm.

The Nationals leader was pictured on the Gold Coast over that weekend in photographs posted by his partner to social media, before returning to Canberra on the evening of 12 February.

Littleproud's register of interests also lists a private residence in Barton in the ACT and Ryeford in his electorate of Maranoa, which remains his primary home.

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Barrister Geoffrey Watson SC told Guardian Australia the rules are “purposive ... we don't want our parliamentarians to be unfairly separated from their families”.

“That's got to be the purpose of the trip ... If the purpose of the trip is to settle in to a new holiday property or to enjoy your first long weekend at a holiday property, well you've just failed at the first hurdle.

“Just by saying ‘I'm going to Queensland’ - it's a big place, about the size of Western Europe.”

But Griffith University academic, professor AJ Brown, said that “provided the weekend travel was to unite with members of his family and it was no more expensive than what it would've cost to travel home” then the travel could be justified.

“The guidelines should support appropriate work-life balance,” noted Brown.

The IPEA said that “questions in relation to specific work expenses are best referred to the relevant parliamentarian”.

“IPEA does not generally comment on any individual matter as it could potentially compromise the conduct and/or outcome of any investigation, and the privacy of individuals concerned.”

Bill Browne, the democracy and accountability program director at the Australia Institute, said “parliamentary expenses data should be published as early as possible”.

“Given how family-unfriendly a career as a parliamentarian can be, it’s positive that the expenses system takes this into consideration - but as with any workplace, it’s important to follow the spirit of the rules around expenses, not just the letter,” he said.

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