



**Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais**

*Minutes of the Commission
Wednesday, 18th February, 2009*

1. The third meeting of the Commission of 2009 took place at 5.15 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.

2. MEMBERS PRESENT.

Deputy John O'Donoghue, T.D., Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Senator Paul Bradford, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Tom Hayes, Senator Cecilia Keaveney, Deputy Séamus Kirk, Deputy Michael Mulcahy, Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Pat Rabbitte and Senator Jim Walsh.

3. RATIONALISATION OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES.

The Commission had before it the following documentation:

- (i) correspondence from the Minister for Finance requesting that the Commission bring forward proposals for a significant reduction in the amount spent on Oireachtas allowances and also consider the issue of foreign travel.
- (ii) correspondence from Deputy Pat Rabbitte setting out proposals in response to the Minister's letter.

At the outset the Commission was mindful of the general context to its discussions on the system of allowances for members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in that the fixed allowances paid to members have not been increased since 2001, and is not within the Commission's statutory remit as it is solely a matter for the Minister for Finance, as the statutory regulatory authority. The Commission's role is therefore a self-appointed, informal one of making recommendations which, on past experience in other areas, are not always acceded to by the Minister of the day. The role of the Commission therefore is at arm's length in that the actual sums of public money to be disbursed and the conditions attaching to that disbursement, are both regulatory matters for the Minister for Finance.

Following discussion the Commission agreed to recommend to the Minister for Finance as follows:

- (1) The Commission strongly endorses a move from the current system of miscellaneous expenses to a single parliamentary allowance encompassing attendance recording and deductions for non-attendance as set out in the Commission's recommendation to the Minister for Finance dated 20th January, 2009, and recommends that the regulations necessary to implement this change be made by the Minister for Finance as a matter of priority.
- (2) As an interim measure pending the introduction of the single parliamentary allowance, and in recognition of the fact that the Minister has requested reductions in public expenditure to be implemented with effect from 1st March, 2009, the Commission recommends the following package of proposals for implementation by the Minister for Finance by way of statutory instrument as appropriate and which will yield reductions of approximately €3.8 million per annum, representing a 20% overall reduction in the budgets in the areas concerned:
 - (a) a reduction in the Dublin daily allowance of 12.5% (yielding a saving of €34,000);

- (b) a one-quarter reduction in the Oireachtas pre-paid envelope allowance (from 1,750 to 1,300 per month) (yielding a saving of €670,000);
- (c) a reduction of 50% in Committee travel expenditure (yielding a saving of approximately €250,000). In this regard the Commission recommended that the Working Group of Committee Chairs give priority to the Foreign and European Affairs Committees in the allocation of travel budgets for Committees;
- (d) a change in the appropriate regulations to provide that Ministers and Ministers of State should not qualify for the payment of the special secretarial allowance (yielding a saving of €800,000);
- (e) a change in the relevant primary legislation to require independent members of the Oireachtas to account for their use of payments received under the Party Leaders' Allowance by way of audit in the same manner as applies to parliamentary party leaders;
- (f) a reduction in the number of Oireachtas Committees to 15 (yielding a saving of up to €2 million). In this regard, the Commission noted-
 - (i) that the detailed implementation of this recommendation is a matter for the Houses themselves on motions sponsored by the Government;
 - (ii) that approximately up to €1.2m of this saving relates to the salaries of permanent Civil Service staff. The Commission noted that this saving would have to be delivered over time by natural wastage through non-filling of vacancies in the absence of a centrally agreed system for redeployment of general civil service resources.

The Commission divided on proposal (f) as follows:

Tá: Deputy John O'Donoghue, T.D., Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Senator Paul Bradford, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Tom Hayes, Deputy Séamus Kirk, Deputy Dan Neville and Deputy Pat Rabbitte.

Níl: Senator Cecilia Keaveney, Deputy Michael Mulcahy and Senator Jim Walsh;

- (g) a reduction of 25% in the mileage rates payable to members (yielding a saving of €500,000). In this context, the Commission agreed that the implementation of the single parliamentary allowance should incorporate appropriate provision for members living long distances from Leinster House.

4. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 7.10 p.m.

JOHN O'DONOGHUE, T.D.,
Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission.
Dated: