

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT CARNARVON
FRIDAY, 29 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION SIX

Members

Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson

Hearing commenced at 2.37 pm

Mr BRIAN WALLBANK
Retired, sworn and examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Hello; how are you?

Mr Wallbank: Very well, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I ask you to take an oath or an affirmation for us, whichever one you wish to say?

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: We have your address on the witness form and you are just appearing today as a private person?

Mr Wallbank: I did submit a written thing.

The CHAIRMAN: You have given us a written submission, have you, Brian?

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, we will have that on record. We may not have that with us today. You have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Did you read and understand that document?

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of the hearing and please be aware of the microphone. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Brian, I do not have a copy of your submission with me here today, but I have a summary of the matters that you have raised in your submission. So, Brian, your main issues are that the accommodation and the petrol funding are inadequate.

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: You say that it should not be means-tested for eligibility but subsidies should be increased for pensioners and very low-income earners; the administration process is very stringent; payment is denied for minor non-conformity in completing forms; and no consideration is given to extraordinary circumstances. Perhaps you might just like to expand on those areas for me. When you say it should not be means-tested, I do not think it is means-tested.

The Advisory Officer: No; he is saying he agrees that it should not be.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying it should not be?

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And that there should be a bigger subsidy for pensioners and low-income earners?

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: So, levels of —

Mr Wallbank: Yes, are quite out of proportion. My biggest moan is the fuel subsidy. For example, if I was working on a station and using my own vehicle to do windmill runs and so on and so forth, I would be entitled, according to the government through their station awards rate, to 78c a kilometre using my own personal vehicle. I have found out since then that the fuel rate that PATS has worked out was done by RAC—goodness knows how many years ago—and has not changed one little bit; and it is also on a scale of small car, medium car, big car, which does not just wax with me there. I cannot see why if anybody has a small car, everybody has to have a small car. You know, it is being discriminatory.

The CHAIRMAN: So you use the PAT scheme how frequently?

Mr Wallbank: Not very often. It was unfortunate that we had to use it this time. The wife had been sick and we had to find out what was happening. She could not drive. I had to be a driver for her, so we had to go down. She was entitled to \$60 a night to camp. I was entitled to \$15 a night to camp. PATS would have arranged the accommodation for us at \$136 a night with us paying the difference. And I said, “Well, I think I can get accommodation quite a bit cheaper than that there.” It was left in our hands and for us to notify them if we could. I did. I got accommodation for \$120 a night there at a caravan park in a unit with an ensuite. That is still a lot cheaper than what PATS could get us accommodation for, and we still paid the difference.

The CHAIRMAN: How much did you receive in fuel subsidy for the trip?

Mr Wallbank: It worked out, I think it was, 16c a kilometre both ways, and they said that was \$126. We drive not a big car, but it is a four-wheel drive.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you recall how much it did actually cost you in fuel, roughly?

Mr Wallbank: No, I could not recall because when we got down there we fuelled up again and I think it cost us roughly \$110 to fuel up when I was down there.

The CHAIRMAN: So, it is probably covering about 50 per cent?

Mr Wallbank: I would say a little bit more, but it does not cover wear and tear and —

The CHAIRMAN: In your submission, and I do only have a precis of it here, you say that there was no consideration given to extraordinary circumstances. What is your experience in that regard; you had extraordinary circumstances and they were rejected?

Mr Wallbank: No. We sort of had to argue with it to get it for even me to be able to drive the wife down at that stage because she had a driver’s licence, but with the illness that she had, she could not drive. She also needed somebody to care for her while she was down there, and because I was not a registered carer, they were kicking up about it. So, I had to go back to the doctor and say, “Look, she’s got to have somebody there with her and her husband is suitable.”

The CHAIRMAN: So then it was approved?

Mr Wallbank: It was approved then, but I got the \$15 to help us out there with accommodation.

The CHAIRMAN: And that is the standard for all of the accompanying carers?

Mr Wallbank: Most units, whether they be at a motel, a caravan park or anything, are from \$110 to \$130-odd. That is contained and it does not matter if it is one or two people; whereas PATS were railing about \$60 each. That is what it would have cost me—\$60 for me and \$60 for her.

The CHAIRMAN: That is great; thank you.

Mr Wallbank: The other point I would like to bring up—it does not have a lot to do with her—is that I am from over Meekatharra way, and our people, desert people a lot of them, use the StarCard fuel cards. A lot of the places out there cannot cash them because they are not with the StarCard thing there, the franchise. I think that is something else that has got to be looked at. Whether somebody from over that way is going to bring it up when you get over that way, I do not know.

The CHAIRMAN: That is Caltex, is it not?

Mr Wallbank: Yes.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Brian, are most of the service stations through there Gull?

Mr Wallbank: A lot of them are not service stations when you get out around Cotton Creek and right out in the desert there; they are a fuel depot and they have not got facilities for StarCard. So what has been happening with the people there is that our doctor friend out there has had to give the people the money to get the fuel and get their card off of them to get reimbursed sort of thing. But it is just a mongrel thing to have to do.

The CHAIRMAN: We will take that into consideration as well. Thank you very much.

Mr Wallbank: Thanks very much.

The CHAIRMAN: I know that we have two other people who want to give evidence to us, but we have our scheduled witness with us now, and once we have heard from Fiona, if we still have some time we will certainly be able to take some further evidence.

Hearing concluded at 2.46 pm
