



Australian politicians' expenses

Labor minister Don Farrell claimed \$9,000 for family travel during sports events and theatre showings

Minister says family travel expenses, including those claimed around the time of AFL grand final and a sunset dinner at Uluru, are 'in line with relevant rules'

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Mon 8 Dec 2025 21:16 AEDT

Last modified on Tue 9 Dec 2025 09:35 AEDT

Senior government minister Don Farrell charged taxpayers \$9,000 over three years for his family's travel costs after being invited to football games and tennis matches around Australia, parliamentary records show.

Amid growing scrutiny of politicians' expenses, it can be revealed that Farrell, the trade minister, also charged thousands to bring family members to Sydney, where he accepted tickets to the opera; to Uluru, where he received an exclusive sunset dinner; and to Melbourne at the time of a theatre premiere.

Analysis of the register of parliamentary interests and reports from the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority's (IPEA) records show at least nine instances where Farrell recorded family travel expenses - amounting to \$9,001.11 - to cities where he had declared receiving free tickets.

The Coalition has demanded an investigation into expenses incurred by Anika Wells, the minister for communications and sport. It follows revelations she used her [travel entitlement to bring family members to cricket and football matches](#), the Melbourne Formula One grand prix, and to the Thredbo ski resort while she was attending those locations on official ministerial business.

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But the shadow communications minister, Melissa McIntosh, has also defended several family reunion claims, including bringing a family member to Bathurst in 2021 while campaigning with then prime minister Scott Morrison.

Quick Guide

What are the family travel rules?

Politicians in Australia can claim nine business class airfares for their spouse to travel from their home city to Canberra each year, according to the parliamentary expense authority, the IPEA. Politicians can also claim three economy fares per child.

For places outside of Canberra, however, politicians can claim three return business class airfares for family members in total.

IPEA's website says: "Family reunion travel can be accessed where: the parliamentarian is travelling for the dominant purpose of conducting parliamentary business, and; the family member/s travels to accompany or join the parliamentarian, and; travel is for the dominant purpose of facilitating the family life of the parliamentarian"

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IPEA records show McIntosh made a family travel claim of \$429.64 on 5 December 2021, the weekend of the Bathurst 100, and a day after she posted a selfie on the grid with Morrison.

First **reported by Sky News**, McIntosh also claimed parliamentary travel expenses for flights to Queensland with her son in 2023, costing \$590.73, while he competed in the Australian National Judo Championships on the Gold Coast. McIntosh told Sky News she did not know about the judo competition before planning her trip, made while she was shadow mental health minister.

Farrell is among the government's most-travelled ministers. IPEA's website says there are "additional family travel expenses available for family of senior office holders" on top of the entitlements accessible by all MPs.

Farrell said in a statement all his expenses were "in line with the relevant rules and guidelines".

"The family reunion provisions are an important feature of our framework, allowing a diverse range of members and senators to represent their communities in our nation's parliament," he told Guardian Australia.

"Our parliament would be a lesser place if it weren't for the mechanisms that allow young mothers, single parents, those with families, and those with caring responsibilities to serve as elected members."

Family travel detailed

The family travel rules, according to IPEA, annually allow for nine business class return air fares to Canberra for a spouse or nominees, plus three economy fares for each child, from their home city each year. For travel to destinations outside Canberra, parliamentarians are allowed to claim a total of three return business class air fares in total.

There is no suggestion Wells or Farrell contravened these rules.

On Monday, the treasurer, Jim Chalmers, said he believed Wells' travel had been within existing rules, saying that "the rules are policed by an independent authority [the IPEA] at arm's length from politicians".

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Farrell claimed a total of \$1,385.21 for family travel from his home city of Adelaide to Sydney on 12 January 2023, returning the next day. On his register of interests, Farrell declared receiving “2 tickets to La Boheme and hospitality at the Sydney Opera House, courtesy of Opera Australia on 12 January 2023”.

He charged a total of \$352.78 for family travel to Melbourne on 28 January, returning 30 January 2023. Farrell declared on his register of interests that he had received “2 tickets and hospitality to the Australian Open in Melbourne on 29 January 2023, courtesy of Tennis Australia”.

Flights between Adelaide and Melbourne, between 29 September and 1 October 2023, incurred \$1,290.91 in family travel. Farrell had declared “2 tickets and hospitality to the 2023 AFL Grand Final ... courtesy of Endeavour Group”.

In 2024, Farrell declared two tickets to the Australian Open on 27 and 28 January from Tennis Australia. He also claimed \$1,230.99 for family travel to Melbourne on 26 January, returning on 29 January.

Later that year, Farrell declared receiving three tickets to the Melbourne premiere of *Beauty and the Beast the Musical*, and hospitality at Her Majesty’s Theatre, on 29 June. Farrell charged \$808.98 to taxpayers for family travel from Adelaide to Melbourne on 29 June, returning the next day.

Farrell also claimed \$2,093.65 for family travel between Adelaide and “Ayers Rock”, via Sydney, between 29 August and 1 September. Farrell declared receiving “two tickets and hospitality to the Wintjiri Wiru Sunset Dinner at Uluru, NT, courtesy Voyages on 30 August 2024”.

He declared four tickets and hospitality to the AFL grand final on 28 September 2024, and claimed \$1,155.37 for family travel to Melbourne on 27 September - the day before the game - and then from Melbourne to Canberra on the day after the match.

Farrell received tickets and hospitality to the Australian Open on 25 and 26 January 2025, while claiming \$407.52 for family travel between Adelaide and Melbourne between 25 and 27 January.

The minister declared two tickets and hospitality to a Treasury Wine Estates event in Melbourne on 27 September. He also charged \$275.70 in family travel during that time, with one expense titled “Melbourne” on 26 September and another “Adelaide” on 28 September.