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Attorney-General Michelle Rowland refers herself to independent expenses authority over \$21k family trip to WA

Another Labor Cabinet member has referred herself to the independent expenses authority after it was revealed she billed taxpayers more than \$21,000 for a family trip to Western Australia.

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Attorney-General Michelle Rowland is the latest to have her spending probed as Opposition Leader Sussan Ley demands an overhaul to political perks.

Attorney-General Michelle Rowland has referred herself to the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA), Sky News can reveal.

Ms Rowland is now the second minister after Anika Wells to self-refer to the

watchdog amid a travel expenses scandal engulfing the government.

The specific expense in question was a family trip to Perth, in July 2023 which cost the taxpayer \$21,685.



Attorney-General Michelle Rowland has referred herself to the IPEA. Picture: NewsWire / Martin Ollman

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Since the Albanese government was elected in 2022, Ms Rowland has billed taxpayers \$133,076 on travel allowance, \$63,489 on international travel and \$49,679 on family travel.

"The Attorney-General has referred a trip from 2023 to the IPEA for advice," a spokesperson for A-G Rowland told SkyNews.com.au.

The Prime Minister confirmed Ms Rowland's referral in a press conference on Friday and asked the IPEA for advice on the matter.

"At least two members of parliament have referred themselves for the details of their audit. But in addition to that, I've said to IPEA, please give us some advice, and we'll take that on board," Mr Albanese said.

It comes as Communications and Sports Minister Anika Wells came under fire this week for her extensive use of taxpayer funds to fly to herself and family members to sporting events.

These include flights for her husband to attend multiple AFL and NRL grand finals, two Boxing Day Test matches, a Formula 1 Grand Prix, and the Thredbo ski resort.

She also spent almost \$100,000 for three flights for herself and two staff to go to New York for a three-day summit where she gave a seven minute speech.



Sky News host Chris Kenny analyses the scandal surrounding Communications Minister Anika Wells. Ms Wells, along with two other officials, has been found to have spent almos...

"I understand people want value for taxpayer money. I take taxpayer money really seriously," Ms Wells told reporters on Wednesday.

"These rules are set at arm's length from parliamentarians and made under the previous government. I have abided by the rules. I have followed the rules."

Despite growing public backlash, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese rebuffed questions around changing the guidelines.

On Thursday he shrugged off the scandal, saying his priorities lied elsewhere.

But pressure is now mounting on the Prime Minister to reform the entire framework following the public backlash to Ms Wells' expenses.

Opposition Leader Sussan Ley offered bipartisan support to Mr Albanese to overhaul the system on Friday.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Ms Ley requested a meeting immediately to discuss urgent reform.

"I am seeking a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss, on a bipartisan basis, how your Ministerial Code of Conduct can properly be enforced," Ms Ley said in a letter seen by Sky News.

"As well as how public trust in the broader parliamentary system can be strengthened, so community expectations are being met."



Nationals Senate Leader Bridget McKenzie claims Anthony Albanese is running a "protection racket" for Anika Wells because he is the "decision maker" of the expenses....

Ms Ley said the IPEA's probe into Ms Wells' expenses was "appropriate, but not sufficient" and requested he immediately refer his minister to the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet for investigation.

Ms Ley said the Prime Minister should seek advice on whether Ms Wells breached

the ministerial code of conduct.

"If you believe the Minister has not contravened the Code, I invite you to say so publicly," she said.

"If you are unable to offer this public assurance, the Minister's position is untenable and she must be stood down."

Health Minister Mark Butler has made the strongest indication yet that the government would look at reviewing the framework around travel expenses.

Mr Butler said he would welcome any advice from the IPEA into whether the existing system is meeting community standards.

"As the Prime Minister said yesterday, we would welcome that advice and recommendations. If they then have to be enacted through legislation, I'm sure, that's what we would do," Mr Butler told Sunrise on Friday.

"I for one, will welcome the authority not just looking at the claims that Anika Wells has referred to them ... but looking at whether their system is meeting those two standards: that it's a reasonable balance, the use of taxpayer funds with the need to reflect the unusual nature of these jobs, and they're being used in a sensible way."



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