

<b>Member</b>	Kim Wells	<b>Electorate</b>	Rowville
<b>Period</b>	01 July 2023 to 30 September 2023		

<b>Regulation 6 - Expense allowance and electorate allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for electorate allowance	\$10,354.14
Total amount paid to member for expense allowance	\$0.00

<b>Regulation 7 - Motor vehicle allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for motor vehicle allowance	\$5,341.26
Member did not receive the motor vehicle allowance in the previous quarter and member has elected to receive the motor vehicle allowance for this quarter	No

<b>Regulation 9 - Parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	\$0.00
Suburb in which the member's parliamentary accommodation is located	n/a

<b>Regulation 10 - Travel allowance claims</b>					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Town or city in which accommodation was located	Value of the accommodation

Total number of nights for travel allowance claims 0  
Total amount paid to member for travel allowance \$0.00

<b>Regulation 11 - Commercial transport allowance claims</b>					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Mode of transport	Value of transport

Total number of nights for commercial transport allowance claims 0  
Total amount paid to member for commercial transport allowance \$0.00

<b>Regulation 12 - International travel allowance claims</b>			
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid
23/09/2023	29/09/2023	Flight from Melbourne to Yerevan (America) return	\$9,456.19

Total number of nights for international travel allowance claims 0  
Total amount paid to member for international travel allowance \$9,456.19  
See attached travel report for further details



## **Electorate Travel Report, Parliament of Victoria**

### **2023 Australian Delegation to Armenia**

**23 September 2023 – 28 September 2023**

**<6 Days**

**Hon Kim Wells MP**

State Member for Rowville

**Ann-Marie Hermans MLC**

State Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

#### **Reason for travel and relationship to our Electorates:**

The South-Eastern Metropolitan Region is home to several Armenian Community Centres.

The Armenian community have reached out to develop relationship with members of parliament and want to be heard.

Springvale has an Armenian community that meet regularly for meals and fellowship, and a section in the Springvale cemetery which includes a memorial park.

The electorates of Mulgrave and Rowville also have Armenian Community meeting places and Armenian communities.

The Armenian National Committee of Australian Victorian office is located in Scoresby, in the state seat of Rowville.

Consequently, we are heavily lobbied by the Armenian community on a number of matters.

Firstly, the Armenians have requested that the Victorian Parliament establish a Parliamentary Friendship Group with Armenia. This has been attempted in previous years, but due to some MP's unfounded sensitivities surrounding the 1915 Armenian Genocide, has not progressed. The National Committee believe a Parliamentary friendship group would allow an exchange of ideas and debates with visiting Armenian Members of Parliament.

Secondly, the Armenian National Committee of Australia have requested that the Victorian Parliament acknowledge the Armenian genocide. Currently more than 30 countries have recognised this event, including the United States, Canada and France. In Australia, the State Parliaments of New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania have adopted a motion recognising the Armenian genocide.

## **Objective:**

As outlined in our reason to travel and how it relates to our electorate and Parliamentary Business, the objective of the trip to Armenia is to decide whether we will support a “Parliamentary Friends of Armenia” and/or be members of the group. Secondly, whether we will work with other MPs to bring forward a motion to the Parliament to acknowledge the 1915 Armenian Genocide. At this point, we are probably in favour of the friendship group, and need more information regarding the Armenian Genocide motion.

Understanding the current issues Armenians are facing with regards to global and logistical sensitivities, their culture, history, nation, national identity and current issues are also paramount in the investigation to understand how to support the Armenian community in our electorates.

## **International Travel arrangements:**

Ann-Marie Hermans travelled on Qatar Airways, leaving the evening of Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September, with a long layover at Doha airport on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, to arrive at the Marriot Hotel in Yerevan in the early hours of the morning of Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

Kim Wells, due to commitments, flew in on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September and both Ann-Marie Hermans and Kim Wells flew Qatar Airways on Thursday evening of 28<sup>th</sup> September, arriving in Melbourne on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September, late in the evening.

## **Internal Travel arrangements:**

Most internal national travel was organised by the Armenian National Committee and included travelling by coach and transfers by taxi and uber.

Some travel in Yerevan could be completed on foot.

## **Accommodation:**

Accommodation for Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September to Thursday (late check out at additional cost) 28<sup>th</sup> September was at the Marriott Hotel, Yerevan, on the Russian circuit. However, one night accommodation was inland at a location, approximately 16 kms from Goris, and the Armenian border road to Artsakh.

Kim’s accommodation expenses were:

24 – 26 September and 27 – 28 September, Kim stayed at the Marriott in Yerevan. Cost was AUD \$ 563.82. Inland accommodation expenses are not yet known and will be covered privately by Kim.

## **Organisations and Persons visited (with brief summary) included:**

- Meetings with some of the Board members of the Armenian National Committee in Australia.
- Parliament of Armenia, Yerevan – including official meetings with selected parliamentarians and government officials, including the Minister for Energy and the Leader of the Opposition.

- Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex, including the Memorial Museum with photographic evidence of the Armenian genocide and its impact on families and orphaned children.
- Etchmiadzin – the centre of Armenian Christian history, with an explanation of concerns for Christian leaders in Armenia, and an opportunity to understand the significance of this religious, political, and cultural centre.
- Yerablur Military Pantheon – to hear the testimonies of some Armenian soldiers, and commemorate fallen Armenian soldiers, including those who died defending their country and those in various conflicts. It also commemorates the fallen Freedom Fighters, those missing-in-action, and the graves of some of the national heroes of Armenia.
- Garni Temple – historical UNESCO World Heritage site (2,000+ years old) and a local demonstration of ancient and current basic flatbread cooking to understand Armenian cultural foods in times requiring fortitude and resilience.
- Armenian Relief Society – meeting volunteers preparing the Australian Lord Mayor’s Appeal for the displaced and starving people of Artsakh.
- The Red Cross tents and outposts at the town of Goris near the border of Artsakh for the displaced and refugee Armenians from Artsakh.
- Ara Ketibian, author of ‘Azeri Aggression Against Armenians in Transcaucasia, Reports from the US Press (1905-1921), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Protests of concerned Armenians in Yerevan were witnessed as “democracy in action.”

### Publication of interest

- Ketibian, A. (2023) Azeri Aggression Against Armenians in Transcaucasia, *Reports from the U.S. Press (1905 -1921)*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed.

#### **Videos to provide historical understanding:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrNoOUIGS3U> This short video includes images of displaced Armenians in Goris when it reached more than 65,000. The parliamentary delegation stood on location in these areas, and witnessed the first of many thousands of Armenians as they fled to Goris from Artsakh.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pu7MP9x5fM0> Blocking the “Road of Life”: Nagorno-Karabakh asks for help to lift blockade.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm-7LKUrfSk> The involvement of France in the need for humanitarian aid and food for the people of Artsakh.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ1S4tRKJmo> Armenia, one year after the war.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6oIDyEa024> Who can Armenia count on? (French news (in English) which includes images of Goris, the city near the border visited by our Parliamentary delegation a couple of weeks before these images were taken).
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7PdgnKXuWA> What next for the Armenians? (USA report)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-jq8PLO5AA> Nagorno-Karabakh: 'Ethnic cleansing' of Armenians - mass exodus from their republic originally called Artsakh.

## Summary

Meetings with the Armenian National Committee leaders, and Armenian parliamentary and diplomatic officials helped Victorian parliamentarians understand the following:

- The Armenian National Committee in Australia is an active advocate for the people of Armenia in Australia, and an excellent source of communication for parliamentarians in the significance of Armenian history, community, and culture for Australian Armenians.
- The Armenian National Committee is a bipartisan organisation that wants to appropriately support Armenians around the world.
- The Parliament of New South Wales has officially recognised the genocide and demonstrates an understanding of current issues of Armenian persecution, having already established a Parliamentary Friends of Artsakh.
- Armenians are proud of their ancient history as the oldest Christian nation in the world.
- Armenia is filled with relics, architectural wonders, and geographical beauty, with remarkable stone monasteries and buildings, that not only speak to Armenian history but are ancient, remarkable, and inspiring for visitors. These buildings should be preserved and protected.
- The Armenian people are intelligent, capable, likable, and hard working. Their history and lifestyle demonstrate their resilience, optimism, courage, hope, good humour, and tenacity in the face of consistent and historical adversity and geographical tensions.
- The Armenians have good business products, including their famous Armenian brandy, and they are looking for ways to develop business opportunities internationally.
- The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 devastated the nation, traumatising its identity with a pain that has not, and cannot be forgotten. Surviving images and the inspiring memorial demonstrate the deep suffering of their humanity, and the pain and resilience of the orphans who survived.
- The Armenians have lost many of their countrymen, defending their nation from attacks. They feel the rest of the world has forgotten them and not advocated for their needs or supported them enough in times of persecution and dire crisis.
- The people of Artsakh were able to flee Armenia when the road blockade (blocking food, medical supplies etc) was lifted. This blockade, which had persisted for 10 months prior to our arrival, had been deliberate to cause starvation, death, and sickness amongst the Armenian people of Artsakh.
- At the time of visiting Armenia, the parliamentary delegation noted that international support and aid for the Armenians of Artsakh was only provided by the Red Cross which was present when the Armenians fled Artsakh to save their lives.

- By the time we reached the border town of Goris in Armenia, the first thousand people had managed to cross the border and thousands more were on their way.
- Armenians from Artsakh reported three days of absolute terror prior to the blockade being lifted, with hundreds of civilians being killed, including the killing of Armenians from an explosion at a gas station, where they reported hundreds, and potentially over a thousand people had been wounded.
- Reports of Isis style videos and executions were reported by the Armenians of Artsakh who said no mercy had been shown for the lives of their elderly or their children in the terror of civilians.
- People fleeing Artsakh had left with few, if any possessions, and many, if not most, arrived with only the clothes they were wearing.
- Parliamentarians witnessed the exodus of cars, and trucks, some with bags and a few belongings.

#### **The Parliamentary visit to Armenia achieved the following:**

- Victorian and New South Wales parliamentarians were able to bond and work together in a bi-partisan manner, to support the Red Cross, Australian Armenian young people who had flown over to help the refugees, and the Armenian volunteers, to distribute food and learn about the conditions, and circumstances of this terrible time of tragedy for the Armenians of Artsakh.
- Victorian Parliamentarians learned of the diplomatic tensions and challenges that other parliamentarians and diplomatic leaders work with when they share geographical borders with nations with historical and cultural differences, and identified how this impacts their use of power and resources from neighbouring countries.
- The delegation developed a genuine empathy for the Armenian people and a sincere appreciation for their history, culture, and deep concerns for the past, present, and future of their people.
- The visit helped raised global awareness on social media, improving international recognition and empathy for the political concerns and humanitarian needs of the Armenians from Artsakh. According to a verbal report from the ANC, the EU and US were reported to have committed to provide \$4 Million and \$11 Million in humanitarian aid during the visit.

#### **Recommendations arising:**

- A parliamentary friends of Armenia should be established in Victoria to help Victorians and parliamentarians appreciate the rich heritage and struggles of the Armenian people, the nuances and importance of their cultural heritage and community in Victoria and overseas.
- The Armenians deserve to have their Genocide identified, internationally and nationally recognised. In Victoria, this should happen as soon as it is practically possible within the realms that regard and consider the repercussions of current cultural sensitivities.