

\$1000 rise gives MPs a happier New Year

From BRAD GROUCH in Canberra

FEDERAL MPs will get a \$1000 New-Year pay rise plus a new telephone perk on top of a "backdoor" \$5000 pay rise.

MPs are due to receive the 1.4 per cent pay rise in March as the third leg of a 4.9 per cent increase which has been phased in over the past 15 months.

The pay increase was granted to public servants but is automatically passed on to politicians and will take a backbencher's base wage to \$69,624.

Last week, MPs were also told they could apply for a free mobile phone with unlimited phone calls - previously they could bill calls to the taxpayer but had to buy the phone themselves.

The extra cash and perk comes on the heels of controversial changes to their car allowance approved by the Independent Remuneration Tribunal to bring MPs in line with senior public servants.

This will see politicians pay a maximum of \$700 per year for a private car complete with fuel petrol and servicing, instead of the \$6000 previously charged.

The car does not have to be used for electoral purposes and is free to be used by family members.

Independent MP Ted Mack yesterday criticised the changes as part of the "expanding universe" of politicians' perks.

"The next thing they will be asking for is dachas for ministers," he warned.

The Prime Minister and Governor-General already have two residences each in Sydney and Canberra, and it won't be long before the Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister also want a Canberra residence.

"When that happens the rest of Cabinet will want houses and so will the outer ministry."

Mr Mack said the lack of guidelines attached to the use of cars and phones could cause a conflict of interest for some politicians.

He said the \$700 cars could be used by families for private purposes and there were no guidelines for use of mobile phones.

Mr Mack intends making a submission to the tribunal which could break the nexus between public service and politicians' pay.

Furniture spending slammed

THE Employment Department was yesterday accused of empire building after revelations it spent almost \$100,000 on furniture for new executive offices.

The department's top brass moved to new premises in Canberra last month and the furniture was bought for use in the executive board room and conference area, the lobby and the secretaries' offices.

Included in the purchase was a \$13,845 conference table, \$12,376 on a lounge setting and \$15,015 on furniture for the lobby.

In each case existing furniture was considered too small to be used in the new premises.

The Opposition claimed that while some new furniture was necessary, the fit-out was extravagant.

Opposition administrative services spokesman David Connolly said it was a case of spending running out of control.

FACE clues in hunt for killers

POLICE have released computer-generated images of three men they want to question over the bashing of songwriter and rock band promoter Crispin Dye who died in hospital last week.

Mr Dye, 41, was found unconscious in the gutter of Little Oxford St in Darlinghurst at 4.30am on December 22. He suffered horrendous head injuries and died in St George Hospital on Christmas Day when doctors

switched off his life-support system. A police spokesman said witnesses reported seeing three men near Mr Dye's body early on December 22.

Earlier that evening Mr Dye, the former manager of rock bands AC/DC and Rose Tattoo, had visited several nightclubs with friends.

Police said the computer images of the wanted men, which were created using a new technique called Facial Automated Composition Editing (FACE), were more realistic than previous identification methods.

Two images have been created for one of the men, based on different descriptions from witnesses.

"Through the use of the FACE system we believe the images are very close to the descriptions given to us by the witnesses who say they saw people near Mr Dye's body on the night," the spokesman said.

"The descriptions given to us by the witnesses were closely examined and the final images were refined through the FACE system."

Police believe robbery was the motive for the attack and have confirmed Mr Dye's black leather wallet has not been found.

Detectives trying to trace Mr Dye's last movements believe he was at Gilligan's nightclub in Oxford St until at least 1am, when his friends left.

His movements between then and 4.30am when he was found injured remain a mystery.

The three men wanted for questioning were all dark-skinned, aged from 17 to 18 and about 180cm tall.



Images of the men police are seeking

Westpac tips interest rate fall

HOME buyers could be in for a New Year's treat with a leading Australian bank predicting another cut in the official interest rate.

Westpac chief economist Bill Evans has tipped interest rates will fall next month.

Official interest rates have been cut 18 times since January 1989 and fallen from 18 per cent to less than 5 per cent. Home mortgage rates have

fallen from 17 per cent to less than 9 per cent.

"Interest rates will go down further in early 1994 and will not rise until 1995," Mr Evans predicts in the latest edition of Market Insights.

St George Bank economists agree interest rates will be stable during 1994 and National Australia Bank group manager of corporate relations, Hayden Park, said the low inflation rate would keep interest rates "around about where they are now".



When you go down to the woods today . . .

SO YOU don't believe there are fairies at the bottom of the garden?

When A Midsummer Night's Dream opens this week, the Royal Botanic Gardens will transform into a verdant stage for the magical characters.

Fairies and elves will spring from the foliage, bringing Shakespeare's work to life.

The play's star-crossed lovers really do fall asleep in the woods, actors exit up garden paths, fairies swing from the trees and Puck has a soft lawn on which to somersault.

This year's production will star former E Street member Marcus Graham (above) in the dual role of Oberon and Theseus and A Country Practice star Diane Smith (with Graham), who has the dual roles of Titania and Hippolyta.

Audiences change location to follow the action.

A Midsummer Night's Dream will run from Wednesday until January 11.

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