

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

### ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES – 16 FEBRUARY 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Travel Costs

**Question reference number:** HSW 53

**Senator:** McKenzie

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 29 March 2012

**Number of pages:** 2

#### Questions:

- a) For the financial year to date, please detail all travel (itemised separately,) undertaken by your portfolio Minister and Parliamentary Secretaries. Include details of what the travel was for, what cost was spent on travel (including travel type – i.e. business airfare), accommodation, security, food, beverages (alcohol listed separately), gifts, entertainment, and all other expenses.
- b) For the financial year to date, please provide the same information (itemised separately) for any Minister and Parliamentary staff that accompanied the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary on their travel and include a similar breakdown of the costs incurred by or on behalf of those staff.
- c) For the financial year to date, please provide the same information (itemised separately) for Departmental officers that accompanied the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary on their travel and include a similar breakdown of the costs incurred by or on behalf of those staff.
- d) For the financial year to date, please detail all travel (itemised separately) undertaken by employees of each department and agency within each portfolio. Include details of what the travel was for, what cost was spent on travel (including travel type – i.e. business airfare), accommodation, security, food, beverages (alcohol listed separately), gifts, entertainment, and all other expenses.
- e) Are employees taking the most direct route when travelling? If not, please explain why.
- f) Are lounge memberships provided to any employees? If yes, what lounge memberships, to how many employees and their classification, the reason for the provision of lounge membership and the cost per employee.
- g) When SES employees travel, do any support or administrative staff (such as their Executive Assistant) travel with them? If yes, provide details of why such a staff member is needed and the costs of the support staff travel.

**Answers:**

- a) These arrangements are administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.
- b) These arrangements are administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.
- c) In the course of our business, DHS officials and the Minister may attend the same event. Travel records do not record whether travel includes attending any events that the Minister has also attended.
- d) Expenditure for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 January 2012 for DHS staff travel (which incorporates air, coach, sea, rail and air charter travel) was \$11,026,907 (GST inclusive).

Expenditure for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 January 2012 on staff accommodation provided by DHS was approximately \$7,272,000 (GST inclusive). This expenditure represents close to all DHS accommodation expenditure, but excludes a small number of situations where staff are paid an allowance and required to arrange their own accommodation. These are principally travel to very remote localities where commercial accommodation is unavailable and accommodation for staff under the CRS Australia Program, who are being moved, over the course of 2012, to the arrangements applicable for all of DHS.

Other travel-related costs cannot be separately itemised. Under the DHS agreement, allowances for meals and incidentals are made as a single payment to the traveller. No component of these allowances is for the provision of alcohol.

An itemised list of all aspects of travel undertaken by officials would need to be generated manually and this would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.

- e) DHS officials are required to accept the Lowest Practical Fare (LPF) offered for a business trip. In most cases of domestic travel, the LPF would be the fare for the most direct route. All international travel is booked by a dedicated travel officer to ensure the best value for money is obtained. Identifying if each trip is the most direct route, however, would require considerable manual analysis and would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.
- f) Yes. Lounge memberships are provided by DHS to:
  - DHS Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. Eligibility is prescribed in their employment entitlements; and
  - DHS non-SES employees who are frequent travellers. Eligibility criteria are specified in the DHS Travel Policy.

DHS provides Qantas Club and Virgin Lounge memberships. Currently a standard annual corporate Qantas Club membership costs \$275 and a Virgin Lounge membership costs \$249. There may also be joining fees, pro-rata prices for part year memberships and reduced rates for longer term memberships.

For the period 1 July 2011 to 31 January 2012, DHS provided 281 memberships at a total cost of \$100,232.

- g) DHS SES employees only travel with support or administrative staff when there is a specific official business requirement for them to do so.

Travel records do not specifically identify whether support or administrative staff are travelling with an SES employee. Identifying individual trips for staff that coincided with an SES employee's travel would require considerable manual analysis and would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.