

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

14 February 2013

Question: AET 942-949

Topic: Travel costs (ATO)

Hansard Page: Written

Senator BUSHBY asked:

942. For the financial year to date (22 February 2013), please detail all travel for Departmental officers that accompanied the Minister and/or Parliamentary Secretary on their travel. Please include a total cost plus a breakdown that includes airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals).
943. For the financial year to date (22 February 2013), please detail all travel for Departmental officers. Please include a total cost plus a breakdown that includes airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals). Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
944. What travel is planned for the rest of this financial year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
945. What travel is planned for the rest of this calendar year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
946. Are the Government's Lowest Practical Fare travel policy for Domestic Air Travel (Finance Circular No. 2009/10) and Best Fare of the Day for International Air Travel (Finance Circular No. 2009/11) guidelines being followed? How is the department/agency following the advice? How is this monitored? If the guidelines are not being followed, please explain why.
947. Are lounge memberships provided to any employees? If yes, what lounge memberships, to how many employees and what is their classification, what is the reason for the provision of lounge memberships and the total costs of the lounge memberships.
948. When SES employees travel, do any support / administrative staff (such as an Executive Assistant) travel with them? If yes, provide details of why such a staff member is needed and the costs of their travel.
949. Does the department/agency elect to offset emissions for employees' work-related travel? If yes, what is the cost?

Answer:

942. In 2012-13 to 28 February 2013, no ATO officers have been required to undertake travel associated with the Minister's office.
943. The ATO is a large organisation with offices around Australia and over 80% of its staff located outside of Canberra. The need for the ATO to connect with staff, the community, businesses and tax professionals spread across the country necessitates official travel by employees in the course of their ordinary duties.

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The ATO's 2012-13 budget for travel has been reduced by approximately 20% compared to the 2011-12 travel budget. A 2% travel levy has also been imposed internally to support investment in technology, including video conferencing facilities, to reduce the need for travel.

Approval for travel is required from an ATO delegate (other than the traveller), and delegates must only provide approval if the travel represents value for money and is considered the most appropriate way to meet business needs. Transport and accommodation costs for SES and EL2 officers are paid directly by the ATO and a meals and incidentals allowance is paid in advance to the traveller. For EL1 officers and below, a travel allowance, including meals, incidentals and accommodation, is paid in advance.

ATO expenditure on travel related costs (including the Australian Valuation Office, Australian Business Register, Tax Practitioners Board and Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission) in 2012-13 to 28 February 2013 was \$23.0 million. A breakdown of this expenditure is provided in Table 1 below. Table 2 provides a break down of air fare expenditure by class.

Table 1: 2012-13 Travel related expenditure (to 28 February 2013)

Travel Expenditure by category	2012-13 (\$m)
Air Travel	8.8
Travel Allowance Payments*	8.5
Taxi Fares	2.7
Fleet Costs	2.6
Other Incidental Travel Costs	0.3
TOTAL YTD	23.0

*Travel allowance includes \$2.27 million for SES and EL2 accommodation.

Table 2: 2012-13 Airfare expenditure (to 28 February 2013)

Airfares Expenditure by class	Economy (\$m)	Business (\$m)	First Class (\$m)	Total
Domestic	4.4	3.9	0.0	8.3
International	0.1	0.4	0.01	0.5
Total	4.5	4.3	0.01	8.8

944. The ATO is unable to quantify or provide itemised data specifically related to what travel is planned for the rest of this financial year.
945. The ATO is unable to quantify or provide itemised data specifically related to what travel is planned for the rest of this calendar year.
946. Yes. ATO policy requires staff to utilise the lowest practical fare and best fare of the day principles established by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. Education sessions have been held at most major sites and all staff, when booking, must put a valid reason code against any fare that does not meet the cheapest of the day requirements to explain the variance from the cheapest available flight. The reasons provided are visible to approving delegates and reported to business area finance managers.

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947. ATO policy allows for staff that are likely to undertake a certain number of return flights in the forthcoming 12 month period to receive an ATO-funded airline lounge membership. For general employees, the requisite number of return trips is twelve and for EL2 and SES employees, it is eight return trips. The ATO does not fund airline lounge membership for staff who do not meet these conditions in relation to travel frequency.

Table 3: ATO lounge membership

Lounge Memberships	2012-13 (to 28 February 2013)
Cost	\$96,684
Number	271

To attempt to provide the level of detail requested would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

948. Generally no, SES are not accompanied by support staff when they travel. There may be limited instances where staff in executive support roles are required to accompany SES staff on official travel to support the ongoing management of business functions.

The ATO records travel individually on the basis of complete trips, which may have multiple components and travel reasons. For this reason, the ATO is unable to provide data specifically related to travel for activities related to supporting SES.

949. No.