

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES - 14 FEBRUARY 2013 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Travel Costs

Question reference number: HS 55

Senator: Boyce

Type of question: Written question

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) For the financial year to date, 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 include airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals).
- b) For the financial year to date, please detail all travel for departmental officers. Please include a total cost plus a breakdown that include airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals). Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- c) What travel is planned for the rest of this financial year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- d) What travel is planned for the rest of this calendar year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- e) 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.
- 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 total costs of the lounge memberships.
- g) When SES employees travel, do any support or 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 the support staff travel.
- h) Does the department/agency elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel? If yes, what is the cost?

Answer:

- a) In the course of our business, Departmental officers and the Minister may attend the same event in Australia. Travel records normally do not record whether travel includes attending any events that the Minister has also attended.

The Departmental Secretary travelled with the Minister on official business overseas on two occasions this financial year, as detailed in the following table.

Date	Destination	Flight Type	Flights Costs	Accommodation Costs	Meals and Incidentals
6-7 Aug 2012	Wellington	Business	\$2,110.38	\$1,841.48	\$355.00
2-15 Dec 2012	UK, Denmark, Netherlands and Germany	First Class, Business (internal Europe)	\$15,448.41	\$5,046.08	\$2,692.86

- b) An itemised list of all travel undertaken by officials would need to be generated manually and this would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources as there are approximately 20,000 individual trips for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013.

Expenditure for staff travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013 was \$7,887,937 (GST inclusive), noting that this includes bus, sea, rail, air charter travel, travel management and administrative fees.

The expenditure for staff domestic travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013 was:

- \$6,533,105 for economy class travel; and
- \$807,401 for business class travel.

The expenditure for international travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013 was \$94,729. DHS officials fly business class when travelling overseas on official business.

The expenditure on travel related fees for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013 was \$452,702.

Total expenditure on staff accommodation for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013 was \$5,655,013 (GST inclusive). This expenditure represents close to all Departmental accommodation expenditure, but excludes a small proportion of travel where commercial accommodation cannot be provided (often due to the remoteness of the location) and accommodation is sourced through the employee's own arrangements and therefore funded through allowances.

Other travel-related costs cannot be separately itemised. Under the Department of Human Services Agreement, allowances for meals and incidentals are made as a single payment to the traveller.

- c) The Department has approximately 36,000 staff located in over 800 locations across Australia with an estimated 30,000 individual trips per year across the organisation. While each work unit will have a plan for future travel, there is no central plan for what travel will be taken for the financial year throughout the Department. To do so would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.
- d) The Department has approximately 36,000 staff located in over 800 locations across Australia with an estimated 30,000 individual trips per year across the organisation. While each work unit will have a plan for future travel, there is no central plan for what travel will be taken for the calendar year throughout the Department. To do so would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.

- e) Yes. DHS travel policies and practices support the Government's Lowest Practical Fare (LPF) policy for Domestic Air Travel and Best Fare of the Day (BFOD) for International Air Travel.

To assist compliance with policy, international travel is managed centrally to ensure that BFOD is booked. All international travel must be approved by the Secretary.

For domestic travel, officials must indicate in their travel request if they have not selected LPF and the reason why, if they have not. Domestic travel requires approval by a *Financial Management and Accountability Regulations 1997* delegate.

The Department has implemented the use of an online booking tool to book travel. This tool presents staff with the airfare that represents the lowest practical fare in accordance with the Government's policy.

Compliance with policy is monitored through regular reports provided by the Department's contracted travel management company.

- f) Yes, Qantas Club and Virgin Lounge memberships are provided by the Department to:

- DHS Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. Eligibility is prescribed in their determination made under section 24(1) of the *Public Service Act 1999*; and
- DHS non-SES employees who are approved as meeting eligibility criteria for frequent travel as specified in the DHS Travel Policy:

"The cost of lounge memberships for non-SES employees is the responsibility of individual employees unless the applicable Spending Approver agrees that the expense is an efficient and effective use of public funds. This would normally be based on a reasonable expectation the employee will be required to travel more than ten times per year on DHS official business."

For the period 1 July 2012 to 31 January 2013, the Department spent \$48,697 on lounge memberships for:

- 131 SES employees; and
- 43 non-SES employees.

- g) It is not the practice for support or administrative staff to travel with an SES employee unless 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.

- h) No, the Department does not elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel.