

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES - 27 FEBRUARY 2014 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Travel Costs

Question reference number: HS 134

Senator: Cameron

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 24 April 2014

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, 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 calendar year from 7 September 2013? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- d) What is the policy for business class airfare tickets?
- e) 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.
- f) 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.
- g) 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 departmental business, departmental officers and the Minister may attend the same event. Travel records normally do not record whether travel includes attending any events that the Minister has also attended.

On 16-17 October 2013, the Minister visited the departmental premises in Alice Springs and Yuendumu, Northern Territory. Departmental officers accompanied the Minister with the following costs:

Date	Flight Type	Flights Costs	Accommodation	Meals & Incidentals	Total
16–17 Oct 13	Business, Economy & Charter	\$7,273.50	\$314.50	\$531.40	\$8,118.90

- b) An itemised list of all travel undertaken by the departmental officer would need to be generated manually and this would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources as there are approximately 14,775 individual trips for the period of 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014.

Expenditure for staff travel for the period 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014 was \$6,613,221 (GST inclusive), noting that this includes international, domestic, bus, sea, rail, air charter travel, travel management and administrative fees.

The expenditure for staff domestic travel for the period 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014 was:

- \$5,697,332 for economy class travel; and
- \$605,357 for business class travel.

The expenditure for international travel for the period 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014 was \$26,856. Departmental officials fly business class when travelling overseas on official business.

The expenditure on travel-related fees for the period 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014 was \$283,677.

Total expenditure on staff accommodation for the period 1 July 2013 to 28 February 2014 was \$4,883,582 (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 travel-related allowances.

Other travel-related costs cannot be separately itemised. Under *the Department of Human Services Agreement 2011-2014*, allowances for meals and incidentals are made as a single payment to the traveller.

- c) Travel plans are managed by local managers as needs arise. There is no central plan for travel to be taken for the calendar year throughout the department.
- d) The department's policy in relation to business class travel is:
“Non-SES employees may only travel Business class in exceptional circumstances with the prior written approval of the employee's SES Band 1 officer (or higher), supported by a documented business case.
SES employees must travel Economy class for flights on the Canberra/Sydney or Canberra/Melbourne route for single leg trips. Business or Premium Economy class may be selected for all other domestic routes, if available.”
- e) Yes, Qantas Club and Virgin Lounge memberships are provided by the department to:
- departmental Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. Eligibility is prescribed in their determination made under section 24(1) of the *Public Service Act 1999*; and
 - departmental non-SES employees who are approved as meeting eligibility criteria for frequent travel as specified in the department's 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 2013 to 28 February 2014, the department spent \$44,624.50 (ex GST) on lounge memberships for:

- 59 SES employees; and
 - 68 non-SES employees.
- f) 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.
- g) No, the department does not elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel.