

# Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

## BUDGET ESTIMATES - 29 MAY 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Travel Costs

**Question reference number:** HS 82

**Senator:** McKenzie

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 27 July 2012

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **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).
- c) 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 this monitored? If the guidelines are not being followed, please explain why.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.

#### **Answer:**

- a) 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.
- b) Expenditure for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2012 was \$18,528,997 (GST inclusive), noting that this includes bus, sea, rail and air charter travel. The expenditure for domestic travel for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2012 was:
  - \$16,400,268 for economy class travel; and
  - \$1,956,435 for business class travel.

The expenditure for international travel for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2012 was \$172,295. DHS officials fly business class when travelling overseas on official business.

Total expenditure on staff accommodation provided by DHS for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2012 was \$12,936,250 (GST inclusive). This expenditure represents close to all DHS 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 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.

- c) Yes. Compliance with policy is monitored through reports provided by the department's contracted travel management company.
- d) Yes, Qantas Club and Virgin Lounge memberships are provided by DHS to:
- DHS Senior Executive Service (SES) employees - eligibility is prescribed in their determination; and
  - DHS non-SES employees who are frequent travellers - eligibility criteria are specified in the DHS Travel Policy.

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

As at 31 May 2012, DHS had provided the following new and continuing memberships:

- 290 for Qantas Club; and
- 44 for Virgin Lounge.

Some of these memberships commenced prior to 1 July 2011.

Expenditure on lounge memberships from 1 July 2011 to 31 May 2012 was \$79,750 for Qantas Club memberships and \$10,956 for Virgin Lounge memberships.

- e) From time to time a support person may accompany an SES officer where there is a business need, such as providing secretariat services for a large meeting or assisting to arrange a large event. The department has identified two trips where a direct reporting support person accompanied an SES officer on a trip. The travel cost was \$7,839.