

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES - 18 OCTOBER 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Travel Costs – 2012-13

Question reference number: HS 103

Senator: Boyce

Type of question: Written question

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 7 December 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 the department/agency following the advice? 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, Departmental officers 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) An itemised list of all travel undertaken by officials would need to be generated manually and this would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.
Expenditure for staff travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012 was \$3,700,264 (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 to 30 September 2012 was:

- \$2,960,573 for economy class travel; and
- \$474,346 for business class travel.

The expenditure for international travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012 was \$48,215. DHS officials fly business class when travelling overseas on official business.

The expenditure on travel related fees for the period 1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012 was \$217,130.

Total expenditure on staff accommodation for the period 1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012 was \$2,786,186 (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) Yes, 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 are being followed by the Department. Compliance with policy is monitored through regular reporting provided by the Department's contracted travel management company.
- d) 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.

For the period 1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012, the Department spent \$28,076 on lounge memberships for:

- 48 SES employees; and
 - 32 non-SES employees.
- e) It is not normal practice for support or administrative staff to travel with SES employees.