

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2015-2016

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Outcome/Program:

Outcome 1. Fair and accountable administrative action by Australian Government entities and prescribed private sector organisations, by investigating complaints, reviewing administrative action and statutory compliance inspections and reporting.

Topic: Travel and Accommodation Costs

Senator: Senator Ludwig

Question reference number: 10

Type of question: FPA, Monday 25 May 2015, pages 135 & 136

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 July 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator LUDWIG: In answer to Senator Wong's questions on notice 171 and 214 it was revealed that the OCO had spent \$408,552.09 on travel and accommodation costs between 1 July 2014 and 28 February 2015—not even a full year. For an agency of 137 employees—forgive me if I think that seems significantly high—what was the travel associated with?

Mr Neave: A significant proportion of that travel was international activities, which really centred on the work we do in some of the most challenging governance environments in the world—the Solomon Islands, PNG, Samoa and Tonga—through our international program, which is funded by DFAT. It is a program we are very proud of. It aligns well with the government's current policy framework by improving public governance to contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly in the South Pacific region. It is funding the travel not necessarily of our officers but of representatives of some of the ombudsmen or other similar officers in the South Pacific coming to Australia. It is part of our twinning program. We have five programs altogether: a twinning program with the Ombudsman Commission of PNG, the Pacific Ombudsman Alliance, which covers our engagement with the Solomons and Vanuatu and a range of other countries in the South Pacific region. We work very closely with the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia. We work with the ombudsman and the Leadership Code Commission of the Solomon Islands. We have recently been funded by DFAT for work on anticorruption in the Pacific, assisting to build integrity networks through ombudsman offices in the South Pacific.

Senator LUDWIG: I am happy for you to take that on notice. Could you provide a breakdown of that staff travel and places that relate to your budget and those that relate to travel that is sponsored by DFAT or another agency, what that agency is and the purpose of

the travel, or just a general synopsis of what that was. It sounds like very interesting and good work. I just would not mind having a bit of a breakdown of that, so that it does not look like you are spending \$408,000 on 137 employees. It might be helpful to explain that story a little better.

Mr Neave: Certainly. I am happy to do that.

Answer:

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (OCO) has been actively supporting Ombudsmen in the Asia Pacific region over a number of years. We do this in two main ways:

- supporting peer relationships and networks; and
- directly assisting individual offices to build their organisational capacity.

The OCO International Program is mostly funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The OCO contributes senior staff time and expertise. The International Program provides opportunities for staff involvement through learning exchange placements, seminars and ongoing dialogue with our international colleagues. The OCO also works in partnership with the Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australian and New Zealand Ombudsmen.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the \$408,552.09 in travel expenses for the OCO for the period 1 July 2014 to 28 February 2015.

Table 1. Travel by Funding Source

| DFAT Funded travel - split by programs | Travel expenses \$ |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Anti-Corruption Pacific | 9,332.33 |
| Indonesia | 53,996.40 |
| Pacific Ombudsman Alliance | 119,247.01 |
| Solomon Islands | 3,484.22 |
| Papua New Guinea | 48,107.27 |
| Total DFAT funded travel | 234,167.23¹ |
| Office Funded travel | |
| Immigration Detention Review | 89,432.63 |
| Inspections and Law Enforcement oversight ² | 23,533.91 |
| Other ³ | 61,418.32 |
| Total Office funded travel | 174,384.86 |
| Total Office Travel | 408,552.09 |

¹ Of the total funding (\$234,167.23) provided by DFAT: \$91,708.55 was provided to staff from one of the OCO's partner agencies, travelling to Australia or another partner agency; and \$142,458.68 was for OCO staff travel relevant to the programs listed.

² Complies with legislative oversight responsibilities.

³ Other travel related to: inspections; outreach programmes; training; travel related to Private Health Insurance Ombudsman merger; and operational travel.