

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Group: 1

Program: 2.1

Question: BE14/018

Senator Macdonald asked the following question at the hearing on 26-29 May 2014:

CHAIR: Thank you for your frugality. I am glad you did not invite me to the party. How is the \$54,312 comprised? I appreciate arts was not in this portfolio, but I assume having kindly found out that information for me you would have some further details of that. This was in March, April and May of 2013 which was in the phoney election campaign period.

Senator Brandis: There might be a fin de siecle air at the time.

CHAIR: You will have to explain to me later what that means. Can anyone tell me how the \$54,312 was made up?

Ms Bassar: My recollection is that there were stakeholder engagement functions. There was one held in Melbourne in Victoria, there was one held in Canberra, there was one held in Sydney, there was one held in Queensland and there was one held in Adelaide.

CHAIR: I again appreciate you are at a bit of a disadvantage because it was not in this department, but do you have any record of what the stakeholder engagement was in, as I say, in the phoney election period? The election had been announced in January if I recall. Do we know what element of consultation or engagement with the stakeholders was?

Ms Bassar: My understanding is that it was an opportunity for the former minister to meet with stakeholders.

CHAIR: Does the \$54,000 include airfares, or was it all on consumables at these stakeholder engagements?

Ms Bassar: It was largely the events themselves. I do not believe that there were airfares involved.

CHAIR: There were five events. On average that is about \$11,000 per event. What would that have been spent on—room hire?

Ms Bassar: A range of things.

Senator Brandis: We will take that on notice. We will break it down between venue hire, alcohol, food, wait staff and other outlays. But I am bound to say that \$54,000 on parties in three months does strike me as being remarkably high. I do not know how, with a straight face, Labor politicians can attack a very modest reduction in the arts budget when their own late minister used the arts budget in that extravagant way for parties.

CHAIR: I am just wondering what we could we have done in the genuine arts field with some \$55,000. Would that promote another regional tour, or—

Senator Brandis: It could have done. It could have provided a grant towards international touring by a major arts company. It could have provided a significant contribution to a regional tour. I do not know if Mr Grybowski is in a position to tell us the average grant to individual artists under the Australia Council's various programs for individual artists.

CHAIR: Are you able to do that, Mr Grybowski?

Mr Grybowski: Not overall. Our grants for individual artists range from \$500 up to tens of thousands of dollars.

CHAIR: If it was an average of \$10,000 we could say at least five additional artists might have been able to be supported with that. I would be very concerned to see how you could spend \$11,000—I have run some parties in my life—

Senator Brandis: I have been to some of them!

CHAIR: Yes! I wonder if the records would show the quality of the champagne and whether there was caviar and that sort of thing.

Senator Brandis: We will get you a very detailed and granular breakdown of the outlays comprising this \$54,000-odd that the former minister spent on parties out of the arts budget in that three months time.

CHAIR: It is not just the three months.

Senator Brandis: We will take it on notice to get the details for the last 18 months if you like.

CHAIR: It would be useful to me if we could get some rough indication of who apart from the minister attended those parties. Would we be able to get a list of the members of parliament who attended? I assume you, as the shadow minister, were not invited, Senator Brandis.

CHAIR: No. When I was the shadow arts minister, I am sorry to say, the minister did not include me in any of his parties. But I probably would have been busy doing other things.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The former Minister for the Arts and Parliamentary Secretary held a series of stakeholder engagement functions in March, April and May 2013. The total cost of these functions was \$54,312.69 including GST. The table below provides a breakdown.

Senator Catryna Bilyk attended the Hobart function on 12 April 2013.

There were no similar stakeholder functions held outside of those listed below.

Description of function	Date/Location	Amount (incl GST)	Breakdown	Approximate number of attendees
Stakeholder function in Melbourne attended by former Minister Burke and Parliamentary Secretary Danby	26 March 2013 Melbourne, VIC	\$8,057.50	\$2,574.00 catering; \$3,696.00 beverage; \$731.50 room hire; and \$1,056.00 labour costs	117
Stakeholder function in Sydney attended by former Minister Burke and Parliamentary Secretary Danby	27 March 2013 Sydney, NSW	\$12,390.80	\$7,920.00 catering; \$4,125.00 beverage; and \$345.80 labour	207
Stakeholder function in Canberra attended by former Minister Burke and Parliamentary Secretary Danby	27 March 2013 Canberra, ACT	\$3,161.00	\$3,161.00 catering	107
Stakeholder function in Brisbane attended by former Minister Burke and Parliamentary Secretary Danby	3 April 2013 Brisbane, QLD	\$5,567.89	\$2,805.00 catering; \$876.04 beverage; \$957.35 equipment hire; \$880.00 labour; and \$49.50 delivery fee	85
Stakeholder function in Hobart attended by former Minister Burke and Parliamentary Secretary Danby	12 April 2013 Hobart, TAS	\$12,000.00	\$3,000.00 venue; \$4,500.00 catering; and \$4,500.00 beverage	150
Stakeholder function in Adelaide attended by former Minister Burke	17 April 2013 Adelaide, SA	\$7,865.00	\$4,355.00 catering; and \$3,510.00 beverage	130
Live Music Roundtable dinner attended by former Minister Burke	1 May 2013, Melbourne, VIC	\$2,858.00	\$2,000.00 dinner; and \$858.00 beverage	20
Live Music Roundtable dinner attended by former Minister Burke	8 May 2013, Sydney, NSW	\$2,412.50	\$1,760.00 dinner; and \$652.50 beverage	21
Total		\$54,312.69		837