

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Budget Estimates Hearing – October 2012
ANSWER TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio

Department/Agency: Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

Program 1: Support for the Governor-General and Official Activities

Outcome 1: The performance of the Governor-General's role is facilitated through the organisation and management of official duties, management and maintenance of the official household and property and administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system.

Topic: Financial requirement for economy class travel

Senator: Ronaldson

Question reference number: PM54

Type of Question: FPA, p.63-64, 15 October 2012

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 November 2012

Number of Pages: 2

Senator RONALDSON: So there was no Finance requirement for economy-class travel until two weeks ago. Could you provide that letter for me and I will put some other requests on notice.

Mr Brady, have you returned early from any trips that you have been on, that you are aware of?

Mr Brady: Overseas trips?

Senator RONALDSON: Yes.

Mr Brady: Not to my recollection.

Senator RONALDSON: Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr Brady: I will.

Answer:

Senator The Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Finance and Deregulation issued a press release on 25 September 2012 regarding '*Making the Public Service More Efficient*' which included reference to across-the-board reductions in air travel spending, including restrictions on business class flights.

Finance Circular 2012/04 '*Use of the Lowest Practical Fare for Official Domestic Air Travel*' was published in September 2012, part of which states:

'Approval/Entitlement to travel at higher fare class (e.g. business class or premium economy). All air travel should be at the lowest practical fare in economy class unless there is a business case or entitlement to travel outside these guidelines. In these circumstances, officials are still required to obtain the lowest practical fare within the entitlement.'

The Office has not been advised of any formal restrictions having been put in place, however the Office has an Official Travel Policy in place, which states:

For Domestic Travel, as a general rule, all staff are required to travel economy class (except the Official Secretary and Deputy Official Secretary who are entitled to travel Business Class). However, staff may travel in Business Class (or equivalent):

- *for any flight leg with a duration exceeding 3 hours; or*
- *where staff are accompanying a person who is entitled to travel at a higher class and for work purposes are required to maintain work contact with that person; or*
- *because of special physical requirements (e.g. pregnancy, injury); or*
- *other exceptional circumstances where approved by the OS/DOS.*

As a general rule, staff travelling overseas on commercial flights may travel in Business Class (or equivalent). Interconnecting domestic flights may also be booked in Business Class or equivalent. The Official Secretary and/or Deputy Official Secretary may travel with the Governor-General in the same travel class for the express purpose of conducting business with the Governor-General during flights.

In practice, the Official Secretary and Deputy Official Secretary travel in economy on domestic flights between Canberra and Sydney and to other destinations along the eastern seaboard, unless operational requirements dictate otherwise (eg. carrying and working on sensitive material).

The only early return from an overseas trip by the Official Secretary was in relation to flight changes necessary as a result of the volcanic ash cloud which enveloped northern Europe in May 2010.