

Home Affairs Portfolio

SENATE QUESTION

(Question No. 4448)

Senator Kristina Keneally asked the Minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs, upon notice, on 17 December 2021:

With regard to Contract Notice CN3815437, per the AusTender website:

1. What was the purpose of this contract, and, specifically, the “extreme urgency or events unforeseen” which necessitated a limited tender.
2. How many employees stayed at AirBnB properties as part of this contract.
 - a. what was the average length of each stay.
3. How many separate AirBnB properties were used as part of the contract.
 - a. please provide a link or print-out for each property listing on AirBnB, including the location of the property, and the average cost per night for each property.
4. How was each property chosen. If departmental officials were involved in deciding which properties to use as part of this contract, people provide the APS band-level and location of each official.
5. What due diligence was undertaken on each property provided in Question 3 to ensure that there were no conflicts of interest or benefits bestowed on governmental officials from the contract.

Senator Cash – The Minister for Home Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

1. The purpose of the contract was to provide suitable accommodation for Returning Government Officials (RGO) to quarantine in when returning to Australia and unable to quarantine in their own residences. Quarantine was to be managed by the ACT Government for all RGOs until their quarantine facility was taken offline on August 23rd 2021. ACT Government removed RGO access to their quarantine facility in order to manage their own health response regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in Canberra.

The first international delegation travelled September 24th 2021 with travellers requiring certainty about where they would be returning to quarantine. Houses were leased through AirBnB starting from September 12th 2021.
2. While this accommodation was made available to Returning Government delegations no Home Affairs employees stayed at the AirBnB properties as part of this contract.
 - a. The average stay of travellers utilising this accommodation was 15 days with their first day in quarantine counted as day 0 and then needing to quarantine until day 14.
3. There were 19 AirBnB properties initially leased as part of the contract but one was returned as it was not fit for purpose.
 - a. Please see Attachment B QON 3a Each property listing on AirBnB.
4. ACT Government provided strict guidelines as to what sort of properties could be leased and the time they needed to be held for. Properties had to be leased for a minimum six week period which accommodated the traveller’s 14 days of quarantine and an additional 28 days post their stay. The additional 28 day requirement was in case a traveller tested positive during their quarantine period. Properties were sourced based on the following ACT Health requirements for home quarantine:

- a. Free standing properties;
- b. Independent access to the building;
- c. The ability to dispose of rubbish without interacting with other people;
- d. No communal or shared areas for car parking access or the clearing of rubbish;
- e. Well ventilated; and
- f. One bathroom available per person.

Decision on the rental of properties was managed by an Assistant Secretary located in the Canberra office.

5. I am advised by Home Affairs that due diligence was conducted on properties to ensure there was no conflict of interest, on one occasion a property was identified as being owned by an employee of Home Affairs and was removed from the pool. However, due to one of the other properties not being fit for purpose following a due diligence inspection, and an absence of any other suitable properties being available this property had to be used. All appropriate conflict of interest measures were undertaken and recorded with the Integrity and Security Division within the Department. This property was handed back to the property owner immediately following the initial six week period and was not reused.