

COVID-19
ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

IQ20-000003

Division/Agency: COVID Aviation Response Programs
Inquiry: Seante Select Committee on COVID-19
Topic: Department of Infrastructure Facilitated flights
Proof Hansard Page: 46-47 (24 September 2020)

Senator Slade Brockman asked:

Senator BROCKMAN: So, as to the 64 facilitated flights, what does that actually look like in practice? Are those flights we've effectively chartered or underwritten the cost of? What, in practical terms, are those 64 facilitated flights?

Mr Atkinson: I might let DFAT answer—or, Ms Dacey, would you like to start?

Ms Adamson: It can mean a range of different things in a range of different settings. It can be working with an airline, with significant numbers of Australians in a particular city. There have been a number of these from India, obviously. We work with the airline. The airline opens their booking system, but not on a global basis; they open it knowing that there are Australians wanting to come home. Earlier on in this process, of course, we worked in very flexible ways with airlines. Indian airlines were flying to Australia to pick up their nationals to take them back to India. We worked with those airlines to ensure that Australians were able to be on flights heading in this direction. So there've been a wide variety of ways used. Essentially, the flights are undertaken on a commercial basis, but we are assisting Australians and working with airlines to be able to get people on those flights. That was working fairly well, with significant numbers of people, before the quarantine issue arose in the way that it did and the caps were introduced.

Senator BROCKMAN: How many people came back through those 64 facilitated flights?

Ms Adamson: I've got that figure. If one of my colleagues can help me, I can give it to you in a minute.

Ms Dacey: Just while Secretary Adamson is looking for that number, there were a variety of ways that the flights were facilitated, including through some underwritten flights, so I can give you the number for the underwritten flights, and that was 5,182 passengers, of the others, and then there were 13 charter flights, and then there would've been some other arrangements. So we'd probably just have to aggregate up to get you a whole number.

Senator BROCKMAN: Okay—

Ms Adamson: I don't have—

Senator BROCKMAN: I'm happy for that to be taken on notice. Could I also get, on notice—unless you have it rapidly to hand—the number of seats that there would have been on those 64 flights?

Ms Dacey: I think we'd want to take that on notice as well.

Answer:

Between 5 April and 8 June 2020, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications administered (with cost underwriting) scheduled and non-scheduled flights that assisted the return of 5,323 passenger to Australia.

Questions about the 64 Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) facilitated flights should be referred to DFAT.