

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES - 4 JUNE 2013 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Travel Costs

Question reference number: HS 67

Senator: Smith

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) For the financial year to date, please detail all travel for Departmental officers that accompanied the Minister and/or Parliamentary Secretary on their travel. Please include a total cost plus a breakdown that include airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals).
- b) For the financial year to date, please detail all travel for Departmental officers. Please include a total cost plus a breakdown that includes airfares (and type of airfare), accommodation, meals and other travel expenses (such as incidentals). Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- c) What travel is planned for the rest of this financial year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- d) What travel is planned for the rest of this calendar year? Also provide a reason and brief explanation for the travel.
- e) What is the policy for business class airfare tickets? Is there still a reduction in business flights as per the media release by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and the Special Minister of State dated 25 September 2012?
- f) Are lounge memberships provided to any employees? If yes, what lounge memberships, to how many employees and their classification, the reason for the provision of lounge membership and the total costs of the lounge memberships.
- g) When SES employees travel, do any support or administrative staff (such as an Executive Assistant) travel with them? If yes, provide details of why such a staff member is needed and the costs of the support staff travel.
- h) Does the department/agency elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel? If yes, what is the cost?

Answer:

- a) In the course of their business, Departmental officers and the Minister may attend the same event in Australia. Travel records normally do not record whether travel includes attending any events that the Minister has also attended.

The Department Secretary travelled with the then Minister on official business overseas on two occasions this financial year, as detailed in the following table.

Date	Destination	Flight Type	Flights Costs	Accom Costs	Incidentals
6-7 Aug 2012	Wellington	Business	\$2,110.38	\$1,841.48	\$355.00
2-15 Dec 2012	UK, Denmark and Germany	First Class, Business (internal Europe)	\$15,448.41	\$5,046.08	\$2,692.86

- b) An itemised list of all travel undertaken by officials would need to be generated manually and this would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources as there are approximately 26,500 individual trips for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013.

Expenditure for staff travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013 was \$13,143,055 (GST inclusive), noting that this includes bus, sea, rail, air charter travel, travel management and administrative fees.

The expenditure for staff domestic travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013 was:

- \$11,155,375 for economy class travel; and
- \$1,145,333 for business class travel.

The expenditure for international travel for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013 was \$146,093. Department of Human Services officials fly business class when travelling overseas on official business.

The expenditure on travel related fees for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013 was \$696,254.

Total expenditure on staff accommodation for the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013 was \$9,479,916 (GST inclusive). This expenditure represents close to all departmental accommodation expenditure, but excludes a small proportion of travel where commercial accommodation cannot be provided (often due to the remoteness of the location) and accommodation is sourced through the employee's own arrangements and therefore funded through travel related allowances.

Other travel-related costs cannot be separately itemised. Under the Department of Human Services Agreement, allowances for meals and incidentals are made as a single payment to the traveller.

- c) The Department has approximately 35,000 staff located in over 800 locations across Australia with an estimated 30,000 individual trips per year across the organisation. While each work unit will have a plan for future travel, there is no central plan for what travel will be undertaken for the financial year throughout the Department. To do so would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.
- d) Refer to answer in (c) (above).
- e) The Department's policy in relation to business class travel is:
- “Non-SES employees may only travel Business class in exceptional circumstances with the prior written approval of the employee's SES Band 1 officer (or higher), supported by a documented business case.*
- SES employees must travel Economy class for flights on the Canberra/Sydney or Canberra/Melbourne route for single leg trips. Business or Premium Economy class may be selected for all other domestic routes, if available.”*

Yes, there has been a reduction in Business class travel as per the Minister for Finance and Deregulation's media release of 25 September 2012. Comparing the month of May 2013 to May 2012, there has been a 23.74 per cent decrease in the number of bookings and a 23.26 per cent decrease in the total costs for Business class travel.

- f) Yes, Qantas Club and Virgin Lounge memberships are provided by the Department to:
- DHS Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. Eligibility is prescribed in their determination made under section 24(1) of the *Public Service Act 1999*; and
 - DHS non-SES employees who are approved as meeting eligibility criteria for frequent travel as specified in the DHS Travel Policy:
“The cost of lounge memberships for non-SES employees is the responsibility of individual employees unless the applicable Spending Approver agrees that the expense is an efficient and effective use of public funds. This would normally be based on a reasonable expectation the employee will be required to travel more than ten times per year on DHS official business.”
- For the period 1 July 2012 to 31 May 2013, the Department spent \$55,083 on lounge memberships for:
- 142 SES employees; and
 - 56 non-SES employees.
- g) It is not the practice for support or administrative staff to travel with an SES employee unless there is a specific official business requirement for them to do so. Travel records do not specifically identify whether support or administrative staff are travelling with an SES employee. Identifying individual trips for staff that coincided with an SES employee's travel would require considerable manual analysis and would represent an unreasonable diversion of resources.
- h) No, the Department does not elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel.