

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Ministerial travel

Senator: Senator Cory Bernardi and Senator Zed Seselja

Question reference number: 45

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Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 17 January 2014

Number of pages: 13

Question:

[Question a]

CHAIR: I just have a couple of questions about a report from July of 2013, in which it said that between July and December of 2012 former Senator Bob Carr hit taxpayers with \$721,577 in flights and hotels. **Are you able to confirm how many overseas trips Senator Carr actually made in the six months from 1 July 2012 to 1 January 2013?**

Ms Kelly: I have the total figures for each year but I do not have them separated according to minister. I can take that on notice.

CHAIR: I would appreciate it if you could provide it, but provide me with the total figures for 2012, firstly.

Ms Kelly: The total figure for 2012 was 190. That was 180 trips by ministers and 10 trips by the Prime Minister.

[Question b]

CHAIR: **Please provide on notice how many of those trips were undertaken by Senator Bob Carr.**

Ms Kelly: Yes, we can take that on notice.

[Question c]

CHAIR: Thank you. **I am also interested in the total cost of (1) travel, (2) accommodation and (3) any other expenses that are detailed for each of these trips—specifically Senator Carr's trips.**

Ms Kelly: We can provide that on notice, but I do not have that with me.

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[Question d]

CHAIR: I did not think you would. I am also interested in who else accompanied the Minister for Foreign Affairs on these trips and, for each of these people, what the travel, accommodation and other costs were.

Senator ABETZ: The cost of the caravan.

CHAIR: That is a great way of putting it.

Senator ABETZ: Or the Carr-avan.

CHAIR: No, I think it is Tim Mathieson who has a caravan. This is the entourage which went with Senator Carr.

Ms Kelly: If that extends to departmental staff, that might have to be directed to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

[Question e]

CHAIR: I will leave it with you to see what you can ascertain—you can provide me with information you think is relevant. Are you able to provide me with the number of overseas trips Senator Carr made from 1 January 2013 until 7 September of that year?

Senator ABETZ: At taxpayers' expense.

Ms Kelly: Again I can only provide you with the total figures for 2013 up to 17 September. I do not have them divided into specific ministers.

CHAIR: Please provide me with the figure you have.

Ms Kelly: The total 2013 figure up to 17 September 2013 is 97, of which 91 trips were trips by ministers and six were trips by the Prime Minister.

[Question f]

Senator SESELJA: What was the total spending on those 97?

Ms Kelly: Again, I do not have the total spend approved, but I can take that on notice.

[Question g]

CHAIR: I would also be interested in the total spend on travel, accommodation and other expenses for Senator Carr's trips in 2013. So I want you to break that down further.

Ms Kelly: Yes, I can do that.

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[Question h]

CHAIR: Are you able to tell me—and I presume you will take this on notice—who else accompanied the Minister for Foreign Affairs on each of these trips and, for each of the people, what was the total cost of their travel, accommodation and other expenses. You will take that on notice too?

Ms Kelly: Yes. Those parts of it that relate to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, PM&C cannot answer. But we will answer it to the extent of our knowledge.

Senator SESELJA: What is the process for approving these trips? Were they approved by the Prime Minister's office? Did they come through the Prime Minister's department?

Ms Kelly: The process in place is that twice a year there is an approach by the Prime Minister to ministers seeking their requests for overseas travel. The Prime Minister receives those bids and provides in-principle approval of those bids on a six-monthly basis. In addition to that, there are ad hoc requests which occur on an unexpected basis.

[Question i]

Senator SESELJA: What level of detail is provided to the department or the PMO when a minister requests that kind of travel?

Ms Kelly: There are guidelines and material is provided which meets the requirements of the guidelines. That is certainly the case in relation to the current guidelines. I cannot speak about the previous government as I was not in PM&C at that time, but I can take that on notice and provide that information to you.

Senator SESELJA: While you are doing that, I am also interested—

Senator ABETZ: If it was Senator Carr, it was approved, I think.

[Question j]

Senator SESELJA: With Senator Carr, I would be interested, if there is a record, in knowing what kinds of bids were put in, what the process of approving them were and how many of them were approved by the Prime Minister's office.

Ms Kelly: I will take that on notice.

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Senator Abetz: I think I recall asking a question about that, and I think only one was ever rejected for Senator Carr, but we will see. That is Senator Bob Carr.

[Question k]

Senator SESELJA: The other thing you might take on notice is: **if there was an approved program by ministers, and Minister Carr in particular, was there ever any significant divergence and what is the process when that occurs?**

Ms Kelly: I will take that on notice.

Answers:

- a Senator Carr made nine overseas trips in the six months between 1 July 2012 and 1 January 2013.
- b Of 190 overseas trips made by Ministers, including the Prime Minister, in 2012, Senator Carr made 14 trips.
- c, d, f and g The Department does not hold information on total costs of ministers' overseas travel. The Department of Finance reports every six months on expenditure by parliamentarians, including on overseas travel.
- e Senator Carr made 14 trips overseas from 1 January 2013 to 7 September 2013.
- h The Department does not hold information on the particular staff member(s) who have accompanied ministers or the total costs of their travel.
- i The details required when seeking approval for travel were included in the previous government's Guidelines on Overseas Visits by Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries (Attachment A). On 4 October 2013, the Prime Minister revised these guidelines, the current guidelines are included at Attachment B.
- j and k The approval process was included in the previous government's Guidelines on Overseas Visits by Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries (Attachment A). Normally twice a year, the Prime Minister invited portfolio ministers to submit an outline of the travel proposals envisaged in their portfolios for the following 12 months. If agreed by the Prime Minister, bids received 'in-principle' approval on the understanding that final approval was subject to

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confirmation closer to the time of the proposed travel when firm details became available. The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff was authorised to consider requests for final approval and ad hoc travel. In 2013, 14 requests for overseas travel by Senator Carr were given final approval.

GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES

Ministers and parliamentary secretaries (ministers) may need to travel overseas for a variety of reasons, eg, to undertake negotiations and discussions with overseas counterparts, to put Australia's view at international meetings, to represent Australia on significant occasions and to gain first hand experience in areas of relevance to their duties.

The following guidelines for overseas visits by ministers and parliamentary secretaries outline the process involved in arranging visits and provide guidance on the sorts of issues that need to be taken into account when ministers and parliamentary secretaries are considering overseas travel.

Travel Proposals;

1. The Prime Minister is responsible for final approval of official overseas travel by all ministers, their spouses and their staff.
2. Normally twice a year, the Prime Minister will invite portfolio ministers to submit to him an outline of the travel proposals envisaged in their portfolios for the following twelve months. In May/June each year the Prime Minister will approve a program which covers the first six months of the financial year and will advise ministers of his in-principle approval for visits included in the ministerial overseas travel program. The situation will be reviewed in November/December in order to settle the second half of the program.
3. At least three weeks before departure, ministers should write to the Prime Minister seeking confirmation of his in-principle approval and providing details of the visit's purpose, itinerary (including details of meetings and activities to be undertaken) and the accompanying party. Proposals should include comprehensive costings for the visit and confirmation from the minister, or their Chief of Staff, that the most cost effective proposal has been put forward for consideration. The Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance) will issue travel warrants and allowance payments on receipt of a copy of the Prime Minister's response giving final approval for a visit.
4. In first submitting proposals, ministers should take the following into account:
 - (a) proposals should indicate the purpose of each visit and the expected dates of departure and return. It is not always possible to predict the dates of visits some months ahead, but the information should be as comprehensive as possible;
 - (b) proposals should be related to specific outcomes and should include only the highest priority visits where the purpose of the visit and involvement at ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated as essential;
 - (c) the duration of absences and the costs of the visit should be kept to a minimum;
 - (d) priorities should be set and travel minimised through consultation within and across portfolios;
 - (e) separate visits should not be planned for business which could more economically be included in one itinerary. Similarly, visits should not be

extended to accommodate business which would be more effectively included in separate itineraries;

- (f) ministers who regularly attend international meetings should aim to tie their other essential travel in with these meetings if possible;
- (g) absences should be planned so as not to clash with parliamentary sitting periods or Cabinet or other (eg Budget) commitments;
- (h) in portfolios with more than one minister, no more than one minister should be absent overseas at any one time; and
- (i) to assist with the co-ordination of Australia's trade and investment effort, those visits which have trade and investment implications should be clearly indicated.

Class of Travel:

5. Ministers are required to travel business class on flights of ten hours or less. Ministers may travel first class on longer flights or on flights involving more than one sector where the combined flight time exceeds ten hours. If travel involves an overnight stopover of one night or more, any onward flight (or combination of sectors) must be greater than ten hours' duration before first class travel will be approved.

By way of guidance, direct flights from east coast capital cities to destinations in China, the United States of America, Europe, Africa and Latin America would be first class destinations, while flights to parts of the Asia-Pacific region, including New Zealand, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore would normally be business class destinations.

Frequent flyer points should not be used to upgrade the class of travel. However, ministers are encouraged to use frequent flyer points to offset the cost of travel at the appropriate class.

Staff: Accompanying staff are entitled to travel at business class only. In exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Prime Minister, approval may be given for staff to travel first class when the minister is travelling first class. Any request for staff to travel at a higher class with their minister must be clearly justified.

Spouse travel:

6. As a general rule, ministers should not be accompanied by their spouses on official overseas travel. Approval for a minister's spouse to travel will only be given by the Prime Minister where a host country has extended an invitation to the spouse and where an official program of engagements has been organised for the spouse to undertake. An accompanying spouse must travel on the same itinerary as the minister. Independent travel by a spouse will only be approved by the Prime Minister in exceptional circumstances. Children, or family members, should not accompany a minister on official overseas travel unless the Prime Minister has approved travel by the minister's spouse or other exceptional circumstances exist.

Ministers and their spouses should travel business class. The Government will meet the cost of fares, accommodation and meal expenses incurred by spouses during official visits.

Accompanying Staff:

7. Ministers are normally entitled to be accompanied by one staff member. Additional staff support is rarely required because:
- (a) Australian diplomatic posts overseas provide assistance with briefing and administrative support during ministerial visits; and
 - (b) departmental staff may accompany ministers and parliamentary secretaries on overseas visits (at departmental expense) to provide advice and administrative support.

The one staff member should accompany the minister on the entire official visit rather than different staff members travelling on different legs of the visit. As noted in part 5 above, accompanying staff should travel at business class.

Ministerial staff are not permitted to travel overseas on government business independently of their ministers.

Sponsored Travel:

8. Ministers should not accept, for themselves or their families, offers of sponsored overseas travel from any source, whether connected directly with their responsibilities or not, without the express approval of the Prime Minister.

General:

9. Ministers are on duty full-time when travelling overseas, although their itineraries may include a reasonable number of rest days. Ministers may request approval to take leave while overseas, but the period of leave must not be excessive and the visit must be clearly defensible in terms of the official business undertaken. All costs associated with a minister's leave are to be met by the minister.
10. Overseas travel should be by normal commercial means. Overseas travel by Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA) or charter will be considered only in special circumstances.
11. Representation of ministers overseas by backbench members or senators will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. Parliamentary secretaries may travel as ministers' representatives if required. Ministers should not approach backbenchers about travel without having first obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
12. Ministers should not invite Opposition members to attend functions overseas without first having obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
13. Overseas travel by ministers, parliamentary secretaries and backbenchers representing ministers is funded under an appropriation that specifically indicates it is to be used for this purpose or under legislation authorising the payment of costs for a member of parliament. It must not be funded under departmental appropriations.

Inquiries: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
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As at October 2009



Australian Government

Department of Finance

APPENDIX: GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES

GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES



GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS BY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES

Ministers and parliamentary secretaries (ministers) may need to travel overseas for a variety of reasons, eg, to undertake negotiations and discussions with overseas counterparts, to put Australia's view at international meetings, to represent Australia on significant occasions and to gain first hand experience in areas of relevance to their duties.

The following guidelines for overseas visits by ministers outline the process involved in arranging visits and provide guidance on the sorts of issues that need to be taken into account when ministers are considering overseas travel.

Travel Proposals

1. The Prime Minister is responsible for final approval of official overseas travel by all ministers, their spouses and their staff.
2. The Prime Minister will, normally twice a year, invite portfolio ministers to submit to him an outline of the travel proposals envisaged in their portfolios for the following twelve months. In May/June each year, the Prime Minister will approve a programme which covers the first six months of the financial year and will advise ministers of his in-principle approval for visits included in the ministerial overseas travel programme. The situation will be reviewed in November/December in order to settle the second half of the programme.
3. In first submitting proposals, ministers should take the following into account:
 - a. proposals should indicate the purpose of each visit and the expected dates of departure and return. It is not always possible to predict the dates of visits some months ahead, but the information should be as comprehensive as possible
 - b. proposals should be related to specific outcomes and should include only the highest priority visits where the purpose of the visit and involvement at ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated as essential
 - c. the lengths of trips, the duration of absences from Australia and the costs of visits should be kept to a minimum
 - d. priorities should be set and travel minimised through consultation within and across portfolios
 - e. ministers should seek to combine visits, where appropriate, to reduce the overall number of overseas visits. Separate visits should not be planned for business which could more economically be included in one itinerary. Similarly, visits should not be extended to accommodate business which would be more effectively included in separate itineraries
 - f. ministers who regularly attend international meetings should aim to tie their other essential travel in with these meetings if possible
 - g. absences should be planned so as not to clash with parliamentary sitting periods or Cabinet or other (eg Budget) commitments
 - h. in portfolios with more than one minister, no more than one minister should be absent overseas at any one time, and

- i. to assist with the co-ordination of Australia's trade and investment effort, those visits which have trade and investment implications should be clearly indicated.
4. Subsequent to receiving in-principle approval, at least three weeks prior to departure ministers should write to the Prime Minister seeking confirmation of his approval and providing details of:
 - a. the visit's purpose and itinerary (including details of meetings, and activities to be undertaken)
 - b. the accompanying party
 - c. flight and accommodation details
 - d. comprehensive costings for the visit
 - e. confirmation from the minister or their chief of staff that the most cost effective proposal has been put forward for consideration, and
 - f. acting ministerial arrangements.
5. Submissions for parliamentary secretary travel must advise that the proposal is supported by the relevant portfolio minister (acting ministerial arrangements are not required for parliamentary secretaries).
6. The Department of Finance will issue travel warrants and allowance payments on receipt of a copy of the Prime Minister's response giving final approval for a visit.
7. In addition to the twice-yearly bids process, ministers may make ad hoc travel proposals as circumstances arise. Ad hoc travel proposals will be processed as final requests, not requiring in-principle approval, but will require the same level of detail as listed above.

Class of Travel

8. Ministers are required to travel at a class no higher than business class on flights. If upgrades are provided, they must be declared in the usual way. However, there will be occasions where airlines offer two classes of travel only. On those occasions, where first class travel is equivalent to business class, travel at first class is permitted.
9. Frequent flyer points should not be used to upgrade the class of travel. However, ministers are encouraged to use frequent flyer points to offset the cost of travel.

Spouse Travel

10. As a general rule, ministers should not be accompanied by their spouses on official overseas travel. Approval for a minister's spouse to travel on an official visit will be given only in exceptional circumstances and where:
 - a. a host country or the organisation hosting the event which the minister is attending has extended an invitation to the spouse, **and**
 - b. where an official programme of engagements has been organised by the host government or host organisation to undertake over the period of the visit.
11. The spouse programme must be independent of the minister's programme. It is not sufficient to include a spouse in the minister's existing programme of meetings. The travel must be justified and defensible. An accompanying spouse must travel on the same itinerary as the minister. Children or family members should not accompany a

minister on official overseas travel unless exceptional circumstances exist and the Prime Minister has approved the travel.

12. In the exceptional circumstances that spouse travel is approved, ministers and their spouses should travel business class. The Government will meet the cost of fares, accommodation and meal expenses incurred by spouses during official visits.

Accompanying Staff

13. Ministers are normally entitled to be accompanied by one staff member. Additional staff support is rarely required because:
 - a. Australian diplomatic posts overseas provide assistance with briefing and administrative support during ministerial visits, and
 - b. departmental staff may accompany ministers and parliamentary secretaries on overseas visits (at departmental expense) to provide advice and administrative support.
14. Departmental Liaison Officers are expected not to travel overseas with ministers.
15. The one staff member should accompany the minister on the entire official visit rather than different staff members travelling on different legs of the visit.
16. Ministerial staff are not permitted to travel overseas on government business independently of their ministers.
17. Accompanying staff are entitled to travel at a class no higher than business class. Refer to paragraphs 8 and 9.

Sponsored Travel

18. Ministers should not accept, for themselves or their families, offers of sponsored overseas travel from any source, whether connected directly with their responsibilities or not, without the express approval of the Prime Minister.

General

19. Ministers are on duty full-time when travelling overseas, although their itineraries may include a reasonable number of rest days. Ministers may request approval to take leave while overseas, but the period of leave must not be excessive and the visit must be clearly defensible in terms of the official business undertaken. All costs associated with a minister's leave are to be met by the minister. If a minister commences leave at the conclusion of an official programme, return travel to Australia is to be from the final destination of the original approved itinerary.
20. Overseas travel should be by normal commercial means. Overseas travel by Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA) or charter aircraft will be considered only where it is absolutely necessary and commercial travel is not feasible, noting that the Guidelines for use of Special Purpose Aircraft set out the factors approving authorities must take into account. Costings for SPA use are to be provided when submitting the proposal.
21. Representation of ministers overseas by backbench members or senators will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. Parliamentary secretaries may travel as ministers' representatives if required. Ministers should not approach backbenchers about travel without having first obtained the Prime Minister's approval.

GUIDELINES ON OVERSEAS VISITS

22. Ministers should not invite Opposition members to attend functions overseas without first having obtained the Prime Minister's approval.
23. Overseas travel by ministers, parliamentary secretaries and backbenchers representing ministers is funded under an appropriation that specifically indicates it is to be used for this purpose or under legislation authorising the payment of costs for a member of parliament. It must not be funded under departmental appropriations.

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