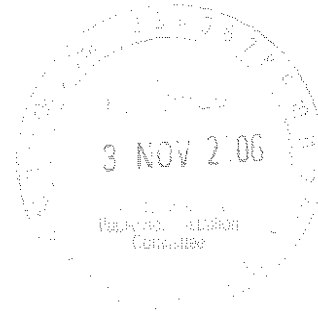


OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 | Phone: (02) 6277 4111 | Fax: (02) 6277 2006 | Email: ian.harris.reps@aph.gov.au

3 November 2006

Mr Alistair Sands
Committee Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Sands

**Evidence presented to the Senate Finance and
Public Administration Committee on 31 October 2006**

I am writing in relation to evidence on parliamentary delegation travel that was provided to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee by the Department of Finance and Administration at the public hearing on Supplementary Budget Estimates held on 31 October 2006.

On that date Senator Robert Ray questioned the Department of Finance and Administration regarding delays in the issuing of travel warrants for overseas travel by parliamentary delegations (please refer to pages 75 and 76 of the transcript for 31 October 2006, which are attached).

In response to Senator Ray's questions, Ms Carolyn Hughes from the Department of Finance and Administration advised the following: "We act on advice from the PRO [Parliamentary Relations Office] about what the official itinerary is and we will only issue a warrant once we have got that advice."

Senator Ray then asked why a letter to him from the Department of Finance and Administration regarding financial arrangements for a delegation to South Africa in September 2006 had to go by safe hand to South Africa because it could not reach him in time.

In response Ms Hughes stated: "We have only got a notification of the official itinerary and the official composition of the delegation a day or two before departure and there is not time to prepare it and to calculate the allowances and to advise you of those in the letter."

In actual fact the official itinerary for and composition of the parliamentary delegation to South Africa, which departed Australia on 29 September 2006, was emailed with official letter to the Department of Finance and Administration by the Parliamentary Relations Office on 25 August 2006, more than a month before the delegation

departed. Attached is a copy of that email and official letter that accompanied the email, along with a copy of a letter from the Department of Finance and Administration acknowledging that the official itinerary had been provided by the Parliamentary Relations Office on 25 August 2006.

I would be grateful if you could provide all committee members with a copy of my letter and ask that my letter be included in the official records of the committee to show that the Parliamentary Relations Office did provide the Department of Finance and Administration with the official itinerary for and composition of the South African delegation with more than a month's notice and not the "day or two" notice claimed by the Department of Finance and Administration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "I".

I C HARRIS
Clerk of the House

Witheridge, Lyn (REPS)

From: Witheridge, Lyn (REPS)
Sent: Friday, 25 August 2006 12:07 PM
To: 'mps.overseas@finance.gov.au'
Subject: Outgoing delegation to South Africa - Sept-Oct 06



TEMP.pdf (166 KB) DOFA letter.doc
(854 KB)

Attached is a copy of the PRO advice letter, as well as the PM's approval letter, about a visit by members of the Joint committee on Intelligence and Security to South Africa, for your information and necessary action please.

Many thanks,

Lyn Witheridge
Assistant Director
Parliamentary Relations Office
Tel: 02 6277 4367
Fax: 02 6277 2000



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Relations Office

Overseas Branch
Parliamentary Travel
Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
Department of Finance and Administration

25 August 2006

**Advice regarding the official visit of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on
Intelligence and Security
29 Sept – 5 Oct July 2006**

Representatives of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security will travel to Cape Town, South Africa, as an official delegation, to attend the International Intelligence Review Agencies Conference. A copy of the Prime Minister's approval of this visit as an additional delegation is also attached. Details are as follows.

Delegation members

Mr David Jull MP - Delegation Leader, Chair of Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
Mr Stewart McArthur MP
Senator Robert Ray
Ms Margaret Swieringa, Delegation Secretary

Official itinerary and notional fare

The official itinerary for the delegation is:

Friday 29 September

Sydney to Johannesburg	QF063	Depart 10:05	Arrive 16:10
Johannesburg to Cape Town	SA363	Depart 18:00	Arrive 20:10

Thursday 5 October

Cape Town to Johannesburg	SA344	Depart 14:40	Arrive 16:40
Johannesburg to Sydney	QF064	Depart 18:10	Arrive 13:55

Carson Wagonlit Travel has advised that the notional business class airfare for the above itinerary is AUD\$12,284.00

Hosting:

South Africa, as the hosting country, will cover costs of conference facilities and meals during the Conference period (1-4 October). Each participating delegation is responsible for its accommodation and transportation costs.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (61 2) 6277 4340 Facsimile: (61 2) 6277 2000 E-mail: PRO@aph.gov.au

Meals & allowances:

Please pay to Members meal allowances:

Saturday 30 September – breakfast, lunch and dinner
Sunday 1 October – breakfast, lunch and dinner
Thursday 5 October – breakfast and lunch

Please also pay equipment and any other relevant allowances.

Overseas posts:

Please provide funding to the post to cover:

- Accommodation (SARand 1821.00 per night)
- Land transport costs

Many thanks for your attention to this request.

Lyn Witheridge
Assistant Director



Australian Government

Department of Finance and Administration

Reference: Trip Number: D1704
Contact: Ms Mari Lopera
Telephone: 6215 3716
e-mail: mari.lopera@finance.gov.au

Ms Margaret Swieringa
Delegation Secretary
Parliamentary Relations Office
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Swieringa

OFFICIAL TRAVEL OVERSEAS – FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

I am writing to advise you of the financial arrangements that have been made for official travel overseas by members of the Parliamentary Delegation to South Africa from 29 September to 1 October 2006.

In accordance with the official Parliamentary Relations Office itinerary of 25 August 2006, the Department of Finance and Administration (Finance) has issued funding warrants for accommodation and ground transport to the Pretoria Australian Post. Individual delegates have also been provided with funds to meet meals and incidental expenses.

Changes to the official itinerary may impact on the incidental and meals allowance(s) paid to delegates prior to their departure. Accordingly, at the conclusion of the official programme, please complete the attached certification form and return to Finance.

Should you require further information, please contact me on 02 6215 3716.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mari Lopera', written over a horizontal line.

Mari Lopera
Overseas Travel
Ministerial and Parliamentary Services
28 September 2006

Senator ROBERT RAY—Have you had any indication whether some of the current staff will probably stay on and work for the new firm? Is it to be entirely new?

Mr Taylor—It is a matter for the new provider—

Senator ROBERT RAY—I understand who it is a matter for; I am just asking what your understanding is.

Mr Taylor—We understand that there may be some staff that are engaged by the new provider, but the detail of that is with the new provider, and between the new provider and staff.

Senator ROBERT RAY—When do the new provider fully take over?

Mr Taylor—The new provider will fully take over on 1 January 2007.

Ms Mason—It is timed to occur in a quiet period to assist with the transition process.

Senator ROBERT RAY—That is smart. How many senators and members have availed themselves of the opportunity to be provided with a new Telecard?

Mr Miles—We would have to find out.

Senator ROBERT RAY—We were notified that if we cared to go to a certain website we could apply for a new Telecard. How many have done so? If the figures are small, does it justify the continued provision of this facility?

Mr Miles—We should be able to get those figures fairly quickly.

Ms Mason—If I could return to the earlier question about client surveys, Mr Miles has talked about the survey of MAPS client satisfaction. There was also within MAPS a survey of Comcar client satisfaction which was conducted in November 2005 and the results were advised to clients in December 2005.

Senator ROBERT RAY—I want to go to a departmental circular—No.29, headed ‘Overseas travel: value for money and accountability issues’. It is put out I note—I understand the subtlety—by the department rather than the minister. Was this sent up to the minister for him to put out at one stage and he very smartly decided to leave you to do it? What motivated this particular circular?

Ms Mason—I think it is important to make sure that we get value for money in the expenditure of public money and it is useful to provide guidance to clients about how that might best be done.

Senator ROBERT RAY—In this, you admonish senators and MPs that they should ensure that there be ‘an efficient, effective and ethical use’ of public money when accessing overseas travel entitlements. Has that not been the case?

Ms Mason—I do not think we were suggesting that it was not the case.

Senator ROBERT RAY—I am wondering why we are being admonished to do so.

Dr Watt—I do not think that is a particularly unusual admonishing. Efficient and ethical et cetera use are standard words in the FMA Act—something we constantly remind all FMA agencies of.

Senator ROBERT RAY—If I were to describe this circular, Dr Watt, I would describe it as uppity. If there are reasons and failures I would expect to be reminded and admonished occasionally, but if there are not I would not expect it. You go on to advise senators and members they should be mindful of the public disclosure of these costs when booking travel. Of course we know that; talk about telling us the bleeding obvious. It would be pretty stupid if we did not know that.

Ms Mason—We have at times had clients surprised by the size of their travel costs and I think it is useful to provide advice on how those costs might be reduced.

Senator ROBERT RAY—Is there a problem? If there is a problem let us find out what the problem is so that we can address it. We are all profligate, are we?

Ms Mason—No, I do not think that I am suggesting that, Senator. I was simply saying that there have been clients who have been surprised by the size of their travel bill and we thought it prudent to send something out to, hopefully, help people to reduce those costs.

Senator ROBERT RAY—What about your issuing of travel warrants when people do access this. Some of the warrants have been arriving down at the travel thing just one, two or three days before travel. Why can’t you do it in advance?

Ms Hughes—Are any of these in relation to delegation travel?

Senator ROBERT RAY—Delegation travel, yes.

Ms Hughes—We have to be advised of the official itinerary before we issue the travel warrant.

Senator ROBERT RAY—So where is the problem?

Ms Hughes—We act on advice from the PRO about what the official itinerary is and we will only issue a warrant once we have got that advice.

Senator ROBERT RAY—So when dealing with these sorts of issues it is like watching the French Tennis Open—we see about 40 shots go backwards and forwards between the PRO and your department. I never know where to lay the responsibility.

Ms Hughes—There should not be any delays with overseas study travel, Senator. There is no restriction—

Senator ROBERT RAY—No, it is delegation travel. Then you are supposed to send a letter out saying what your responsibilities are. Last time I travelled that had to go by safe hand to South Africa because it could not reach me in time. Why is that?

Ms Hughes—We have only got a notification of the official itinerary and the official composition of the delegation a day or two before departure and there is not time to prepare it and to calculate the allowances and to advise you of those in the letter.

Senator ROBERT RAY—You are saying that you are not being notified in time to be able to at least send the letter to an electorate office so people can know what the acquittal regime is et cetera. I did not get my letter that admonished me for giving false evidence until the Saturday, and I travelled on the Friday. I did not get the good news that I was to be admonished not to give knowingly false evidence.

Ms Mason—The circular 29 that you referred to was not intended to admonish clients. It was rather intended to provide what we had hoped was helpful guidance about how to reduce travel costs.

Senator ROBERT RAY—How do you? Apart from comfort food words, how do you actually do that?

Ms Mason—I think by booking ahead as far as possible. That can certainly help in reducing travel costs.

Senator ROBERT RAY—But you see, a lot of the time these travel agents do not want to book ahead. They take your booking six months in advance but they do not make it until two weeks out because they can save money that way.

Ms Mason—They can be requested to make a booking at an earlier time. But there is also a trade-off, as the circular points out, between a fully flexible fare that can accommodate changes to the itinerary and one that may be booked well in advance and attract a cheaper fare but does not provide the same degree of flexibility. These are decisions for travellers to make in relation to their own travel.

Senator ROBERT RAY—Dr Watt, what steps has the Department of Finance and Administration taken to make sure its travel is based on efficient, effective and ethical use of public money? What steps have you taken to reduce your travel costs?

Dr Watt—We do a couple of things. Firstly, we do insist that people get the best fare of the day, and that is part of all our travel consultations in advance. We also encourage, but do not require, people to travel economy whenever possible, so virtually all finance officers travelling Melbourne to Canberra and Canberra to Sydney will travel economy, for example. We do strongly encourage people to limit travel to necessities. For example, we have recently acquired a video conference facility which we now make a fair amount of use of. That cuts down interstate meetings—we do not have a lot. In relation to overseas travel, no-one travels overseas without me agreeing to it and I do not like to see lots of people travelling. I am one for staying home wherever possible.

Senator ROBERT RAY—Dr No, are you?

Dr Watt—No, I am not Dr No. You never should turn down a good investment case but you do have to jump through the hoops to make the case.

Senator SHERRY—Do they travel economy?

Dr Watt—It depends on the trip, the length of time they are away for and the circumstances. Most will travel business class because we tend to go the day before the meeting, arrive for the meeting, turn around and come home. If you expect people to get off a plane and perform, it is pretty hard to do it in economy.

Senator ROBERT RAY—Yes, very hard. While we are on the question of travel—I think I may have given a little advance notice of this—we have had problems of interpretation, have we not, because I think you are bound by legislation in terms of—