

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING: 11 February 2013

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(AE13/0475) PROGRAM – Internal Product

Senator Humphries asked:

(a) Portfolio wide - 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 include 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) Are the Government's Lowest Practical Fare travel policy for Domestic Air Travel (Finance Circular No. 2009/10) and Best Fare of the Day for International Air Travel (Finance Circular No. 2009/11) guidelines being followed?

(f) How is the department/agency following the advice? How is this monitored? If the guidelines are not being followed, please explain why.

(g) 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.

(h) 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.

(i) Does the department/agency elect to offset emissions for employees work related travel? If yes, what is the cost?

Answer:

(a) The department does not have information about travel costs by Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries as these arrangements are administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. The department does not record travel data in a way that allows separate reporting on staff travelling with Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries.

(b) Staff travel expense details for the financial year to date, 28 February 2013 are as follows;

	FYTD 28 February 2013
Domestic	
Economy Fares	\$8 655 933
Business Class Fares	\$49 317
Accommodation & Allowances	\$11 557 361
Sub-total	\$20 262 611

International	
Business Class Fares	\$690 325
Accommodation & Allowances	\$2 648 425
Sub-total	\$3 338 750

Other Costs	
Taxi fares	\$1 301 245
Vehicle costs	\$1 302 324
Sub-total	\$2 603 569

Total of all travel expenditure	\$26 204 930
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Departmental travel expenditure, financial year to date, 28 February 2013

Listed below are the factors contributing to travel expenditure in the department for the financial year to date:

- The department has approximately 80 offices located in Australia and offshore. Employees posted to overseas locations travel with their families to undertake departmental duties.
- The department has a wide network of detention centres within Australia and offshore, including Christmas Island, Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru, which requires departmental movement of employees and clients.
- Departmental officers are required to accompany complex or sensitive clients, who have been involuntarily removed from Australia to ensure their safe return.
- Departmental officers may be required to travel to state offices and overseas posts to monitor operations, attend training, conferences and workshops.
- The majority of domestic business class travel is undertaken by board officials appointed by the Minister, such as the Ministers Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention and the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers. Business class travel is part of their entitlements.

- The department has international engagement with other immigration jurisdictions, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Departmental officers travel to these locations on occasions for bilateral meetings and to attend conferences.

(c) (d) Travel for the remainder of the financial or calendar year is yet to be determined. Factors that will impact travel are as specified in the paragraph above.

(e) (f) Government agencies are required to comply with Lowest Practical Fare (LPF) policy when booking domestic travel. The department's Travel Policy states that officials must select the lowest practical fare for domestic travel and Best Fare of the Day (BFD) for international travel.

No benchmark has been set for compliance with this policy; however the department has set a target of 85 per cent and achieved 85 per cent for the 2011-12 financial year and 83 per cent for the financial year to date, 28 February 2013.

There are several valid reasons for not accepting LPF or BFD, including:

- unsuitable due to time routing or connections
- entitlement to travel at higher fare class
- health and safety issues
- a need for flexibility to change booking.

Strategies implemented to ensure compliance with this policy include:

- monthly monitoring and reporting on compliance to the business areas
- support and education of staff through online learning
- travel policy with clear instructions on LPF and BFD with mandated travel booking processes
- use of the online booking tool offers visibility and transparency, drives savings and efficiencies.

Departmental staff are required to take the most direct route when travelling, however their paramount consideration is value for money and the efficient, effective, and ethical use of public money. Staff travel must also be in accordance with Commonwealth policy.

(g) The department's Travel Policy states that if an official is required to fly regularly (eight or more times a year) and there is a business need, a delegate may approve an airport corporate lounge membership for that official.

The following table itemises the classifications for staff that hold a Corporate Lounge Membership, as at 28 February 2013.

Classification	Number of Memberships
APS 4-6	97
Executive Level 1-2	268
SES	50
Total	415

The department's lounge membership rates for both Virgin and Qantas are as follows:

- Annual Virgin Lounge Membership is \$420.00 - plus one off joining fee of \$330.00
- Annual Qantas Lounge Membership is \$400.00 - plus one off joining fee of \$230.00

(h) The department spent \$6 251 in 2011-12 and \$2 683 in the financial year to date 28 February 2013 on travel for support or administrative staff who accompanied SES officers. Their duties included:

- taking minutes of meetings
- participating in workshops or discussions
- providing other administrative support.

(i) The department does not offset emissions for work related travel.

MRT-RRT

(a) There were no occasions on which MRT-RRT members or staff accompanied the Minister and/or Parliamentary Secretary on their travel in the financial year to 31 January 2013.

(b) The MRT-RRT spent the following amounts on Travel Costs:

- Airfares - \$133 504 (financial year to 11 February 2013)
- Travel Allowance (meals, accommodation and incidentals) - \$112 899 (financial year to 11 February 2013).

All travel is conducted in support of official tribunal business.

(c) (d) The MRT-RRT plans to spend approximately \$75 000 on airfares and \$40 000 on meals, accommodation and incidentals in support of tribunal operations during the rest of the financial year.

(e) (f) The QBT travel booking system is used by the tribunals and it prompts the traveller to select the Best Fare of the Day (BFOD). Tribunal travel guidelines instruct travellers to select the BFOD unless there is a business case not to. A travel request form signed by the appropriate delegate approving travel requires a reason to be provided when the BFOD is not selected.

(g) Membership of The Qantas Club is provided to one employee (SES band 2), and 6 senior members. These memberships are provided on the basis of regular and ongoing travel for MRT-RRT work and must be approved by the Principal Member or Registrar. The cost per employee ranges from \$413 to \$665 for a two-year membership, depending on whether a joining fee is included and the year joined. Total annual pro-rata cost of lounge memberships is \$2 556.37.

(h) When SES officers travel, administrative and support staff, such as Executive Assistants do not travel with them.

(i) The MRT-RRT does not offset emissions for work related travel.