



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 June 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 15 June 2011
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Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (11:52): I appreciate that the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship was able to give the last member a full and detailed response to her question, and I hope that the minister will now give me a full and detailed response to the questions that I pose. I ask the minister, if he does not know the answers to these questions, if he would be able to take them on notice, including those that I asked when I last got to my feet. I seek the commitment from the minister in his response that he will take each of these on notice if he is unable to answer them today.

But I just want to confirm that the minister today, as we debate these matters in detail here, is unable to advise us that in framing the budget for this year he has allocated \$65.7 million as an administered expense in the budget, and he is unable to tell us who it will be paid to. Will it be paid to the UNHCR? Will it be paid to the IOM or any other government agency or the government of Malaysia? It is a fairly straightforward question. Is the payment based on a per capita figure for each of the 800 transferred, and, if so, what is that figure? That would seem to be a fairly basic item to determine what the average total cost will be as it has been placed in the arrangement. He should know whether it includes training for those who enforce immigration law in Malaysia. He avoided that completely. He is unable to provide a breakdown of how this money will be spent on meals and accommodation and over what period of time. So how he comes up with this figure I do not know, and I think it is important that parliament should be told what is in this figure and how it has been arrived at. He is unable to tell us, for example, whether, for those agencies that receive funds, they are paying it out on a fee-for-service basis or as an upfront payment.

These are all matters that I would have thought would have been important in framing the budget position. And he is unable to tell us, about the facility which was reported in the *Daily Telegraph*—and I assume the source came from someone close to the government, if not the minister's own office—that was being developed in Malaysia, whether that report is accurate and what funds are being put in place to support the redevelopment of that facility. Clearly these matters must be under discussion, and clearly they must have been thought of before the minister put this money in the budget. So I ask the minister if he is able to shed some light on those matters today. I would welcome that, but, if he is unable to do that, I am disappointed, I am surprised and I hope that he will attend to getting those responses to us as quickly as possible. I will add a few more to the list. On page 18 of the portfolio additional statements, it states that around \$10 million has been allocated for departmental expenses in relation to the Malaysian agreement. Can the minister provide us with a breakdown of staff costs; staff numbers involved on a full-time equivalent basis; accommodation costs that are included in that budget; costs for travel, training and contractors; and any other relevant line items that go to the composition of that figure over the forward estimates?

Could I also ask the minister about a separate matter. In the budget, \$130 million was allocated for a phantom regional processing centre, because at estimates the department was unable to say where this was or what it was. It was a phantom processing centre. Can the minister advise whether he now knows where that centre that the government have budgeted \$130 million for will be? Does he agree with the foreign minister that current discussions with Papua New Guinea are pointless because they are focused on other issues and, if that is the case and the department has already confirmed that it is not currently talking to any other countries at all about a regional processing centre, whether the 275 people, who have arrived since 7 May, will be transferred to another country, if indeed they are unable to be transferred to Malaysia?

The minister is always very clear about what he says on these matters. He is very careful with his language and he, unlike the Prime Minister, made it clear in a statement on 7 May that only those persons who arrived after the agreement had been finalised would be transferred to Malaysia. Those 275 people are now on our shores, on Christmas Island. Papua New Guinea is not going to be opened anytime soon, unless the minister wants to share something with us today. The Malaysian agreement, referred to in his own press statement and his own statement on 7 May, indicated that they could not be transferred there because it would be prior to the agreement. Where are these people going to go? Where is this regional processing centre going to be? And, if he is unable to answer it, I suggest he pick up the phone to the President of Nauru.