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Charter flights bill soars

Jo Coghlan, Dr, Southern Cross University
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GEOFF CHAMBERS

TAXPAYERS forked out almost $1.7 million to hire charter planes and helicopters to ferry federal politicians across the country.

Up to 60 MPs have claimed charter travel in the past year, including some in major regional and metropolitan electorates serviced by airports.

MPs from all established parties, including the Greens, and Independent Nick Xenophon, made charter travel claims in addition to sizeable domestic airfare bills.

The National Party’s senior MPs Warren Truss, Barnaby Joyce and Nigel Scullion – who each live near regional airports – spent $400,000 on charter travel last year and $289,316 on domestic fares.

Other senior Cabinet members including Eric Abetz, George Brandis, Mathias Cormann and Greg Hunt filed expense claims for charter transport.

According to finance department documents, Mr Hunt travelled by charter to Moranbah last June at a cost of $16,200.

Mr Abetz, the leader of the Government in the Senate, slugged taxpayers more than $7000 to travel between Hobart and Canberra.

City-based MPs have also been using charter transport, illustrating the generous entitlement is not only being used by politicians in remote areas.

Labor Senator Nova Peris and colleagues Tony Burke and Gary Gray lodged expense claims for charters totalling more than $161,000.

The Greens Brisbane-based deputy leader Senator Larissa Waters has claimed charter flights worth almost $11,000 for travel across Queensland, including to Gladstone and Chulalongun.

Greens WA Senator Scott Ludlam claimed for charter travel to Manjimup and Bunbury last March, and Margaret River in late 2013.

Southern Cross University politics and international relations lecturer Dr Jo Coghlan – a former Keating Government and Beazley-Rudd Opposition staffer – said the “age of entitlement was over”.

Dr Coghlan said the electorate was demanding more accountability from politicians.

“The availability of travel is greater than ever – you can get on Webjet and book a cheap flight. Why do they need chartered planes?” she said.