



Party on public purse

Bureaucrats do enjoy the high life

Matt Johnston

PARTYING librarians and globetrotting film bureaucrats have helped government arts agencies rack up a half-million-dollar hospitality and entertainment bill.

As some families tighten belts under cost of living pressures, it can be revealed bureaucrats ate and drank their way through more than \$530,000 worth of events last financial year.

Documents released to the Federal Opposition through Senate estimates show the Australia Council

spent the most — \$171,548.

Screen Australia spent \$125,000, including about \$55,000 in 11 days during the Cannes Film Festival, and a \$12,500 Christmas party at a bowls club.

The Opposition says taxpayers might question some of the spending while many are struggling with rising costs. But the Government says decisions on hospitality and entertainment costs, made independently by the agencies, are governed by strict guidelines.

Librarians showed book-

ish stereotypes count for nothing with a range of events in 2010-11 totalling almost \$100,000.

This included \$16,493 on a dinner and morning tea to farewell Director-General Jan Fullerton.

The National Film and Sound Archive was more frugal, but still enjoyed \$67,427 worth of entertainment and hospitality on the taxpayer.

The National Museum of Australia spent \$71,278.

Victorian Liberal senator Scott Ryan said some enter-

tainment costs were understandable but it was unclear whether there was always value for money.

“Should taxpayers be expected to pick up the bill for menu items such as duck breast and duck confit with cafe au lait foam?” Senator Ryan said.

A spokeswoman for Arts Minister Simon Crean said the Coalition was not serious about the issue because “so many of them turn up to these events and go for the food and wine”.