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Senate Standing Committees On Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

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Scholarly Analysis ‘The Provision of Rescue, Firefighting and Emergency Response At Australian Airports.’

Issues

Whether safety is critical at Australia’s smaller airports?

Yes. In 2014, aviation rescue and firefighting services responded to some 6, 7000 calls relating to airport emergency. Current Civil Aviation Safety Authority regulations require an aviation fire and rescue service at every Australian airport that has at least 350,000 passengers travelling through it each year. However, CASA has recently accepted recommendations from an infrastructure department aviation rescue and firefighting services regulatory policy review which would weaken this standard. Going forward, the threshold would rise to 500,000 passenger movements a year. This idea makes no sense.

Whether Australia has taken precautions to introduce international standards for Civil Aviation?

The proposal does not. Under the international standards and regulations of the International Civil Aviation Organization, aviation firefighters are specifically trained. They must be stationed to be able to respond within three minutes to an aircraft crash or fire for the best chance of rescue. Our existing standards and thresholds on provision of aerodrome rescue and firefighting equipment and services shall be provided at an aerodrome.

What does it mean in practical terms?

Under pressure from Labor and local communities, the government is considering maintaining firefighting services at selected regional airports and then imposing a new threshold from here on.

Conclusion

The change being contemplated should be rejected. Bad ideas come forward from the bureaucracy from time to time. Some of them, once rejected, keep coming back again and again. It was a bad idea in the past and it's a bad idea now. The fact is that, across the board, issues of aviation safety—the safety of the travelling public—have been bipartisan issues. That needs to continue to be the case. Proposals must be given detail attention and must be done urgently in the interests of those communities, in the interests of firefighting in Australia and in the interests of regional economic development in those communities.