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Committee Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

To the Committee Secretary,

Re: Operation of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, and in particular its report on the June 2017 crash of a flight conducted on behalf of Angel Flight Australia

The Civil Air Operations Officers Association of Australia (“Civil Air”) is a registered organisation under the *Fair Work Act (Registered Organisations) Act 2009*. Civil Air was established in 1948 and the Association has eligibility to represent members employed in civilian air traffic control and air traffic services in Airservices Australia. Civil Air directly represents over 70% of employees eligible to be members of the Union.

We thank the Committee for inviting us to make a submission about the operation of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau and in particular the June 2017 crash of a flight conducted on behalf of Angel Flight Australia.

Australia has one of the safest aviation environments in the world and a large part of that is due to the just culture, investigative processes and recommendations championed by the ATSB and its predecessors. Civil Air supports the role and operation of the ATSB and we as a professional organisation have an extremely good relationship with the ATSB with the joint goal of improving safety. As a representative body Civil Air is sometimes in the position where the ATSB are interviewing one or more of our members to determine how they acted or handled a situation. Through the powers and protections in their act we continually see a culture that doesn’t lay blame but instead recommends improvements to prevent similar situations occurring.

The feedback from our members has been that despite the obvious pressures that exist during investigations like this, the ATSB investigators always have an open mind, have no preconceived ideas of what happened and always provide support to ensure all the facts are gathered as part of a thorough investigation. We recognise that the ATSB like any other organisation is not infallible, but we definitely support the underlying processes that they work from as an internationally accepted way to improve aviation safety.



To address the report into the crash that occurred in June 2017 we fully support the need to investigate such accidents to prevent further occurrences. We realise there will always be conjecture about statistics and how they are interpreted. However, given the experts involved and the fact that this is the second triple fatality with very similar circumstances, we completely understand and support the need for the statistical work that appeared in the report. We would never claim to have the expertise to interpret these statistics but from an air traffic control perspective our feedback from members would suggest the added pressures identified with these flights lead to more operational mistakes with us than other similar flights. We think that the mature processes of the entire safety management system in aviation should be followed so we can learn from these incidents, rather than seeking to assign blame. The goal needs to be focusing on how they can be prevented from happening again as there are often many contributory factors that lead to these types of incidents in aviation rather than a single factor at fault.

Civil Air is very supportive of these types of charity flights and many of our members are involved as volunteers. However, as a professional association we endorse a risk-based approach to the regulation of aviation and it appears the baseline risk with these operations is not as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP). To reduce the elevated risk with these operations we would suggest that the committee investigate seeking industry experts to volunteer time and resources to reduce this risk and ensure the valuable charity work continues without added cost. Civil Air is willing to volunteer time and resources to help in any way we can to improve safety and we're sure you will get a similar response from other parts of the industry.

Civil Air submits that the operation of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau is sound as long as the proven investigative processes are followed, and we fully support a just culture approach to aviation with the goal of improving safety and public confidence in aviation safety.

Yours sincerely,

TOM McROBERT
PRESIDENT