



Australian Government
Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Chief Commissioner

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Ms Lucy Wicks MP
Chair
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: jcpaa@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Wicks

Questions on Notice: Efficiency and Effectiveness: Inquiry into Auditor-General's Reports 25, 29, 38, 42, 44, 45 and 51 (2018-19)

The ATSB appreciated the opportunity to attend and answer questions at the Committee's inquiry into Auditor-General's reports 25, 29, 38, 42, 44, 45 and 51 (2018-19) with the ATSB's attendance for the purpose of report No.29 'Efficiency of Investigation of Transport Accidents and Safety Occurrences'. The ATSB provides the answers to the questions put on notice by Deputy Chair, Mr Julian Hill, below.

1. (pp.19) 2017-18 showed a significant decline (over 50 per cent) in completions of short investigations. The bureau advised the ANAO in January 2019: *'It is unclear exactly what caused the drop in short investigation performance and the drop was likely due to multiple factor. Re-establishing a short investigations team in one way this issue could be addressed'*
 - a. Has the bureau discovered the multiple factors that caused the decline and if so could you tell the committee what they are?

Answer: The decline occurred at a time that the ATSB was going through the organisational change program that the inquiry was briefed on at the hearing. This involved the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams and the recruitment of a substantial number of new investigators who required training to produce the targeted outcomes.

- b. Has a short investigations team been established or has an alternative course of action been adopted, if no what approach has been taken?

Answer: The ATSB is retaining the multi-disciplinary teams model which provides for a career pathway for investigators completing short investigations. However, within this model the ATSB has dedicated resources for short investigations.

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2. (pp.23) the bureau agreed with recommendation no.2 and is working towards effectively using collected data about investigation efficiency by adopting a data strategy that provides greater access to business information and introducing a project management approach to investigations that allows for improved investigation tracking, and formalising investigation processes.
- a. Could you advise the committee of the progress made on this recommendation?

Answer: As noted in the report, the ATSB already collects information about investigation efficiency, including investigator effort and costs. The ATSB is working towards using this information more effectively by adopting a data strategy that provides greater access to business information, introducing a project management approach to investigations that allows for improved investigation and recording of investigator effort for each stage of an investigation. The ATSB has already introduced formal investigation processes (including planning and reviews).

3. The ANAO found that over the last five years the time taken and resources required by the ATSB to complete investigations have increased significantly.
- a. What measures are you taking to improve the efficiency of investigations, in terms of both time and resources?

Answer: The ANAO report acknowledged the ATSB was already improving investigation efficiency. At the time of the report's publication, the ATSB had already:

- Focused on clearing a backlog of investigations – compounded by the reduction (up to 30 per cent) of investigator resources leading up to FY16–17. Over 40 investigations were targeted for completion over FY17–18 through our “Back on Track” initiative
- Applied more rigorous processes to decide which notifications merit a safety investigation, enabling better management of demand and capacity
- Commenced a program of work to apply a project management approach to investigations. This program is providing the ATSB with greater visibility of workloads and availability of skills across our workforce
- Conducted a preliminary international benchmarking exercise to measure performance against other like-agencies.

Since the ANAO report's publication, the ATSB has revised some KPIs (see below) and taken the following action:

- Focussed on completing all older investigations (older than 18 months) this FY which will allow the ATSB to realistically meet KPI targets from next FY onwards.
- Returning focus on short investigations through dedicated investigators and managers.
- Are introducing more formal progress milestones during the life of an investigation.

The ATSB has continued to implement the key initiatives set out in table 2.6 of the ANAO's report.

4. The ANAO reported that the ATSB is considering changes to key performance indicators for the timeliness of investigations.
- a. How were the proposed KPIs developed?

Answer: The ATSB varied its 2018-19 Corporate Plan advising:

In March 2019, the ATSB made variations to some of its Deliverables and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to better reflect and measure the activities of the agency. As demonstrated by the revised KPIs associated with Complex and Short investigations, the ATSB is projecting more realistic measures around its capacity to complete these investigations. Further, the ATSB has removed a KPI that measured activities the agency cannot directly control. This former KPI: "Safety action is taken by stakeholders to address valid safety concerns identified in confidential reports" will continue to be reported through qualitative means.

With respect to the revised timeframes for completing complex and short investigations, the ATSB considered the information it obtained from the international benchmarking exercise and data on current timeframes for completing reports. This led to a changed demand/capacity KPI for the average time to complete complex investigations to be set at 21 months with the objective of bringing it down to 18 months once the ATSB's new investigative resources have completed their training and gained the necessary experience.

- b. What changes are required to meet the proposed KPIs? In particular, how does the ATSB propose to manage a reduction in the number of active complex investigations?

Answer: The ATSB is working to meet the KPI by:

1. Reducing the number of new investigations.
2. Using workload information gained through project management to consider capacity before taking on a new investigation.
3. Discontinuing lower importance investigations and investigations unlikely to produce significant safety benefit when investigation resources need to be directed to new investigations.

5. The ANAO recommended that the ATSB report on the efficiency with which it uses resources in undertaking investigations. Can you update the Committee on the implementation of this recommendation?

Answer: The ATSB is undertaking a review of its KPIs which is focussing on how the ATSB reports on both efficiency and effectiveness.

6. What is the status of your work on benchmarking investigation performance against your counterpart agencies in other countries?

Answer: The ATSB is a member (and current chair) of the International Transport Safety Association (ITSA) which is a network of Independent Safety Investigation Agencies. At the ITSA 2019 meeting it was agreed to form a working group to progress a benchmarking exercise. The working group has been formed and is currently considering a paper from the ATSB with a plan to start the benchmarking work.

7. Your investigation database online can be searched by a wide range of criteria, but the operator of the service is not one of the available search criterion—although I understand it is recorded in your database. Is there any reason for this?

Answer: The ATSB does not include a search function for operators in its database as under section 12AA(3) of the Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003, it is not a function of the ATSB to allow adverse inferences to be drawn from involvement in a transport safety matter. The database includes notification information for incidents that are not investigated. As the ATSB cannot verify the veracity of all the information the ATSB does not include details of individuals and operators involved.

In addition, although reporting is mandatory, the ATSB relies on pilots and operators and others (including defence), trusting that safety information they have reported is only used for enhancing safety, and is not unjustly used against them. When the ATSB introduced a publically available database, it was done with the commitment that occurrences will be de-identified to ensure the healthy reporting culture with Australian aviation is maintained.

8. How much did you request in your New Policy Proposal in connection with the allocation of \$11.9m over 5 years in the 2017-18 federal budget?

Answer: New Policy Proposals are not classified for release.

9. Could you provide the staffing profile by FTE and their classification for your investigation work for each financial year from 2013-14, just so we can understand the impact of the budget measure.

Answer: To gain a greater appreciation of the impact, the following FTE figures for investigation work covers the period from 2011-12:

ATSB Investigation workforce	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
APS 6 Technical	0	0	5	4	5	0	0	0
APS 6 Transport Safety Investigator	0	2	5	4	2	4	17	18
EL 1 Senior Transport Safety Investigator	10	13	9	8	6	14	14	13
EL 2 Senior Transport Safety Investigator	47	37	34	31	33	28	21	16
EL 2 Team Leader Transport Safety Investigator	10	12	8	12	9	14	10	11
Total	67	64	61	59	55	58	62	58

Notes:

These figures have been obtained from our payroll reports going back to when the system was introduced in 2010. The figures have been rounded to a full value noting some staff were working on part-time arrangements at various times throughout the reporting periods.

The peak for investigation staff was in 2011/12, then gradually reducing to the low in 2015/16. While it has stabilised over the past three years, the aim is to develop and mature the large intake of APS investigators (FY17/18) into senior investigators over the coming reporting periods.

The peak in Team Leaders (FY16/17) reflects a number of senior investigators taking on additional responsibilities to support our agency's transformation program

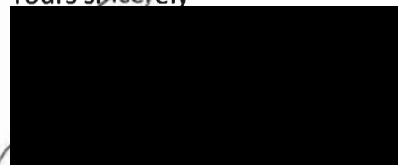
10. Has the ATSB had any interaction with the Minister in the past three years in relation to Air Asia?

Answer: The ATSB has been monitoring low cost carriers more generally. The ATSB's Corporate Plan 2019 – 20 includes the advice:

International aircraft movements have increased by 40 per cent since 2008 with a growing proportion of those movements attributable to international low cost operators, both Australian and foreign. The ATSB has been monitoring trends involving an increasing number of low-cost carriers operating in Australia and investigating more incidents in this sector.

Consistent with standard practice, the Minister's office receives copies of high profile ATSB investigation reports, including those involving Air Asia X. The Minister was briefed at the time of taking over the portfolio that the ATSB is looking at a number of occurrences involving Air Asia.

Yours sincerely



Greg Hood
Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer