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Dr Sean Turner
Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on
Law Enforcement
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Dr. Turner,

This document provides an oversight into the Private Sector Explosives Detection Dog (EDD) industry in the United Kingdom (UK). It has been jointly written by both the Home Office, which owns the policy around non-cargo Private Sector EDDs and by the Department for Transport (DfT) which owns the policy around air cargo screening EDDs.

Private Sector Industry

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A review commissioned by the Home Office in 2018 identified there are up to 60 companies offering the EDD capability with up to 500 EDD teams across these companies. These teams conduct routine, pre-planned defensive searches of venues and events nationwide. These companies are not currently provided with any government approved standards.

The National Canine Training and Accreditation Scheme (NCTAS), the new mandatory training and accreditation standards for police EDDs, went live in January 2020. It provides national assurance of EDD performance across all key operational sectors across the UK.

Using the same accreditation criteria contained within NCTAS, the Home Office, with partners, has developed a version for the private sector (NCTAS-P), bringing the NCTAS standards across to the private sector through its robust accreditation test. NCTAS-P takes a significant step towards improving the performance and reliability of the UK's private sector EDD capability.

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While it will not be mandatory for private companies to sign up to NCTAS-P, they will have a competitive advantage in the sector by being government approved.

Work continues to establish the structure and governance for NCTAS-P to ensure that it is fit for purpose and useable by the target market. This includes publication of the non-sensitive standards, protocols and procedures for sign up for interested companies and access to government approved explosives training kits.

The UK aims to launch NCTAS-P this year. NCTAS-P does not provide standards for air cargo screening EDDs in aviation as DfT's Free Running EDDs (FREDDs) is already established and successfully operational.

Free Running Explosives Detection Dogs (FREDDs)

Department for Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) has responsibility for canine policy relating to private sector canine screening capability for air cargo.

The UK has a history of using privately contracted suitably certified and quality assured canines as a method of screening air cargo for the presence of explosives. Other methods of screening cargo are available to regulated agents and it is up to them to choose the most appropriate for the type of cargo to be screened. The UK recognises the use of Free Running Explosive Detection Dogs (FREDDs) as an appropriate canine screening method for screening air cargo, and allows private sector companies to train and operate these canines. There are a number of certified FREDDs in the UK, with considerable interest from industry to develop this capability further. A number of additional canines are already in training, with further applicants awaiting certification.

The UK developed its FREDD certification and quality assurance process using a research programme it ran in partnership with private sector security companies. Since 2017, the FREDD certification and quality assurance programme has been the only method of validating and continually monitoring canines to screen air cargo in the UK.

DfT requires all FREDDs to be certified before they can work operationally within the UK. The FREDD certification process consists of two elements; a theoretical assessment completed by the handler, and a two-part practical assessment to be completed by the handler/canine team. FREDDs teams are quality assured both regularly and intermittently. Regular quality assurances consist of testing with non-explosive target odours which FREDDs are trained to detect when applied to the outside of live cargo. Intermittent quality assurances are conducted quarterly and consist of testing using real target materials concealed in simulated cargo. Following successful certification, a canine may be re-teamed with a new handler by undergoing and passing a re-team assessment. The new handler must have passed the FREDD handler

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theory test provided by DfT. This robust quality assurance and certification regime provides the UK with confidence that the canines are consistently operating to a high standard.

Before the certified FREDDs are deployed each day for operational screening they are required to undergo a 'warm up' process. This is set up and run by the canine providers and uses the odour identification process. The warm up runs are done at the beginning of the working day and the FREDD must successfully complete them as per DfT protocols before being permitted to work operationally on that day.

The UK previously certified Remote Explosive Scent Tracing (REST) canines as an appropriate method of screening air cargo for the presence of explosives. However, following inconsistent results during a joint-run trial with an ally in 2014, the UK ceased existing REST operations. The lessons learned from the UK REST programme are reflected in the robustness of the FREDD certification and quality assurance regime, providing the UK with confidence that UK certified FREDDs can consistently detect the presence of those explosives for which they have been trained.

The UK Government would be happy to discuss its certification and quality assurance programme in more detail with its Australian counterparts.

The UK is happy to work with the Australian Government to help them in their consideration and potential future development of private sector standards for EDDs across the different disciplines.

Natalie Cook
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