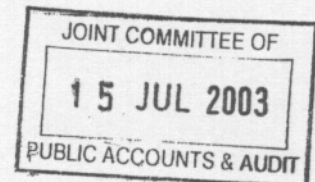


JOHN G HINDE

The Committee Secretary
Joint Committee of
Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Sir

Review of Aviation Security in Australia

I draw to the attention of the Committee to an incident in which my wife and I were involved on 6-7 March of this year on Qantas flight QF1 from Sydney to London via Bangkok. My understanding of the circumstances is derived from personal observation, announcements from the flight Captain and my discussions with cabin crew and fellow passengers.

Qantas flight QF1 departed Sydney on schedule on 6 March 2003. The flight to Bangkok was uneventful and the plane arrived on schedule. Passengers in transit to London proceeded to the transit lounge and in due course the flight was called for reboarding.

During the reboarding procedure a male passenger was arrested when the passport authorities in the transit lounge detected that he was travelling on a forged passport. The male travelling companion of the person arrested, immediately behind the arrested person in the reboarding queue, ran from the transit lounge area.

All of the passengers other than the two referred to above proceeded to board the flight. The Captain announced that a search of the hold luggage was being conducted to remove from the flight the luggage of the passenger(s) not proceeding to London. After some time, all passengers were required to disembark, taking all cabin baggage with them. It transpired that one of the passengers in question, by clerical

of the check-in clerk, had been designated as having two pieces of hold luggage and only one had been located. My understanding is that this error was made in Auckland.

All passengers were then required to personally check individual items of hold luggage on the tarmac before the flight could proceed. This exercise failed to locate any item of hold luggage belonging to one or other of the passengers not proceeding to London and the flight resumed its journey after a long delay.

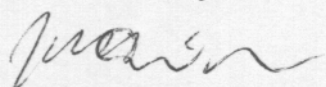
I have no problem with the security measures taken by Qantas. But it concerns me greatly that, in accordance with my understanding of the fact situation, two persons, apparently with forged passports, managed to board a flight in Auckland and pass through transit passport control in Sydney without the forged nature of their passports being detected.

I have raised this issue with my local MHR, Sharon Grierson who has a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, of which a copy is enclosed. The fact situation attested to by the Minister seems to me to be somewhat less than feasible.

The Minister states that the person "detected" in Bangkok did not travel through Australia but attempted to join the flight in Bangkok. If this were the case, the clerical error at check-in which gave rise to the tarmac hold luggage check, must also have been made in Bangkok. And the forged passport must have gone through passport control in Bangkok undetected, yet have been picked up at a second Bangkok passport check in the transit lounge. To my mind, an unlikely scenario.

My concern is that there may be a deficiency in the in-transit passport control area at Sydney airport which allows a forged passport to go undetected. I would appreciate the committee's consideration of the matter.

Yours faithfully



John G Hinde



THE HON ALEXANDER DOWNER MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

30 MAY 2003

Ms Sharon Grierson MP
Member for Newcastle
Suite 7, 451 Hunter Street
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300

- 4 JUN 2003

Dear Ms Grierson

Thank you for your letter dated 22 April 2003 on behalf of your constituents, [redacted] regarding their concerns that an individual may have travelled through Australia on a forged passport in March 2003.

My department has now received confirmation from the department responsible for border control in Australia, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), that the person detected in Bangkok did not travel through Australia on a forged passport. Rather, the passenger in question was detected by officials while attempting to join a flight from Bangkok. Due to the sensitive nature of this matter, I am unfortunately unable to provide you with further details provided by DIMIA regarding this particular case.

The Australian passport is recognised as one of the most secure travel documents in the world. My department continues to trial new technologies and develop ways to further strengthen the security of the document. It also maintains high levels of cooperation with other Australian government authorities and foreign governments to help protect the interests of all Australians.

Thank you for bringing the views of your constituents to my attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Downer', written in a cursive style.

Alexander Downer