

# **SUBMISSION BY THE LHMU TO THE REVIEW OF AVIATION SECURITY IN AUSTRALIA JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT**

---



1. The LHMU has been actively campaigning for improvements in airport security for almost two years. The Union strongly believes that a number of issues need to be addressed including the role of the Federal Government in ensuring compliance by the Airport Owners, the screening authorities and the individual contractors themselves.
2. The Union has always argued that a more hands-on role by the federal government in letting contracts is critical to ensure that security tenders are selected on their ability to provide and maintain a high level security service, and not simply on price. Private ownership of airports, and competitive pressures on airlines means that “value for money” rather than “value of security” can drive the contract selection process down to the lowest bidder rather than the highest level security provider.
3. We generally support the need for more rigorous monitoring of security contractor outcomes, and penalties on companies for non-compliance. In our view, such penalties should also relate to infringements in areas such as staff ratios or for the use of poorly supervised or untrained staff. However, we believe that the airport owners and screening authorities should also be held responsible for any non-compliance with security standards allowed by the individual contractors.
4. For example, the high levels of casual employees and high turnover of staff is a major barrier to improved security arrangements at airports. At a number of airports our experienced Security Officer members are concerned that they have to continually monitor performance of poorly trained casual personnel. We are alarmed that these employment practices continue to occur in a number of potentially high-risk areas.
5. In our view the use of labour hire security employees should be prohibited at all airports and contractors should also be prohibited from any sub-contracting of security services.
6. We further submit that wages and conditions for airport security officers should be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the important role of security officers and improve the status of this important function. We are pleased that as a result of the LHMU’s campaign, security workers have achieved improvements in their wages in most airports. At the commencement of that campaign, security officers were the lowest paid of all airport staff, and this remains so at some airports. Millions of dollars is paid for airport security, but little of that money finds its way into the pockets of the workers who are charged with the responsibility of keeping the travelling public safe.



7. The LHMU is committed to achieving on-going improvements in the wages of security officers. In our view, low wages and poor job security contributes to high turnover of staff and results in the loss of skills within the workforce. It also inhibits the achievement of good security outcomes.
8. The LHMU has previously raised the need for minimum, formally accredited training standards for security officers to be developed by the Government with curriculum to be approved by the Government and audits regularly conducted to ensure training is being implemented. There is great variation in training and workforce standards between airports and an urgent need for national regulation in this area. In some cases training is hopelessly inadequate, and there are huge fluctuations between companies about the quality and quantity of training. There needs to be a national system of accreditation. Companies providing their own training would need to meet national standards and have this authorised by the Department of Transport. Currently, security companies sign off on their own training outcomes, and in our experience, there are a number of cases where minimum standards are not being met.
9. There should also be a greater responsibility for auditing and checking of screening equipment by the Department of Transport. The current approach of the Department of Transport to testing is one which is directed almost exclusively at employees operating screening equipment. There is little emphasis on ensuring that airport screening authorities are meeting minimum standards in the provision of equipment or the training of staff. As a consequence, it is employees who wear the consequences of poor testing outcomes.
10. The Union has identified a number of inconsistencies between airport policy to that of different screening authorities. Our members have become so concerned by these inconsistencies, that the Union has developed policies for members to follow in relation to “Zero Tolerance” and “Airport Rage”. These protocols were developed with members to ensure that their rights are protected should they experience problems either with clients and patrons at the airport, or supervisors and management.
11. What has become clear is that there is no one position being promoted amongst security firms at the moment with respect to the problems being experienced when clients and patrons cannot be cleared by the screening equipment. Despite patrons and clients attempting to be cleared in some instances at least three times, guards are being required to take patrons into secure rooms and physically search them. The LHMU believes that this is a completely unacceptable position. Guards have not been properly trained to undertake extensive physical searches and are in more of a risk in this situation without handheld scanners.
12. In the instances when patrons or clients cannot be cleared through the screening machines, it is the position of the union and our members that the Australian Public Service Guards should be responsible for undertaking the necessary searches to clear the person. A protocol in these circumstances,



should be developed by the Federal Government so that there is a consistent position, clearly articulated to all involved, being the screening authorities themselves, guards, and airlines, so that there can be no confusion as to who is responsible in these circumstances.

13. Finally, we submit that the airport security needs of regional Australia continue to be ignored, and we believe there should be equal security standards irrespective of which airport a plane departs from. The lack of screening of baggage from regional airports remains a major security risk.
14. In conclusion, the LHMU generally supports measures to improve aviation security, but we are concerned that the primary focus of the legislation gives only the appearance of doing so.
15. We call on the members of this inquiry to take a broad approach to reviewing airport security standards in the interests of public safety.

