

REF:SM/17/09/03

September 17, 2003

Mr John Carter
Committee Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts & Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

Subject: Review of Aviation Security in Australia

I am pleased to provide the attached submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts & Audit.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight my concerns in relation to the lack of regional aviation security around Australia. In particular two airports in my electorate, Devonport and Burnie are affected by the minimalist approach to regional aviation security.

Whilst I recognise that implementing additional security measures comes at a financial cost, the personal security of our citizens remain paramount.

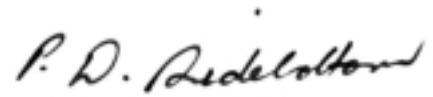
In light of the lack of airport security at my local categorised airports this submission highlights the need for:

- The Commonwealth Government, whether mandating upgrades or as an incentive to upgrade airport security, meet the costs incurred for the implementation of equipment for passenger and carry on luggage screening services.
- Airport owners to sustain the ongoing costs of equipment and staffing associated with passenger and carry on luggage screening services.
- Airport owners to implement tighter security measures for aircraft remaining on their tarmac overnight.
- Airport owners to recoup costs associated with ongoing security by placing a security levy on ticket sales.

This submission seeks a partnership between the community, the Commonwealth, and the aviation industry to help make air travel safer.

Should the committee wish to discuss this submission please do not hesitate to contact me on (03) 6431 1333.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. D. Sidebottom". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the letter 'i' in "Sidebottom".

Sid Sidebottom MP
Federal Member for Braddon

Sid Sidebottom MHR – Submission for the “Review of Aviation Security”

Introduction

I note in the last two years how events throughout the world, and in particular terrorism, have affected our nation. September 11 had a huge impact on Australians, as it did on everyone else around the world, and put us on an alert status, which we have been upgrading ever since.

Events in Afghanistan made it quite plain that our world and terrorism were closely connected, and we felt part and parcel of that fight against terror because we had our own personnel involved.

In the last two budgets there were a number of measures dealing with the upgrading of airport security, as well as other security measures such as the introduction of air marshalls.

Sadly, on 12 October 2002, the terrorist bombing in Bali brought terrorism to our own back door. The families of the victims and the victims who survived this terrible act live with us and are part of our community.

Following on from this tragedy the Federal Government involved Australia in the Iraq conflict, which resulted in Australia listed as a target for Al-Qa'ida.

Recently, there is a heightened security alert. There is nothing specified; it is generalised. Concern over national security and terrorism has now elasticised throughout our community. No day goes past without our media talking about terrorism and security. It is on the streets, it is in the air. It has elasticised and no doubt will continue to elasticise. The Federal Government has demonstrated concern for security upgrades in our airports by introducing the idea of screening domestic hold baggage throughout Australia. The Federal Government has commenced screening maritime containers, because this area is a major concern.

The recent tragic hijacking incident on the Launceston bound Qantas flight 1737 has again highlighted the issue of aviation security. More relevant to my electorate was the concern for what may have happened if this flight had originated from my home airports of Devonport or Burnie. There could have been no impediments to what was taken on board. Clearly the alleged hijacker was deliberate about the nature of the weapons chosen to inflict harm, and this was probably done in the light of the passenger screening processes in Melbourne. This individual would have had no such inhibitions if he had flown out of my local airports. I do not want a tragic incident like this to occur before the government decides that some form of passenger security screening needs to be introduced at my local airports.

Like most citizens of this country, my community takes the issue of security very seriously. It is because of this issue I am writing this submission.

The travelling public of the North-West Coast of Tasmania and many other parts of regional Australia are asked to rest easy on this issue. The Federal Minister for Transport has said in parliament that these airports have individual security plans but these do not involve rudimentary passenger and hand luggage screening. So what do they include? Regional Australians have reason to be sceptical about the Federal Government's reasoning on this issue. Is it really about comprehensive security for all Australians and comprehensive security assessments, or is it all about cost?

The security chain is only as strong as the weakest link and in this case, this is Australia's regional airports.

Overview

I represent the electorate of Braddon, which is located on Tasmania's North-West Coast. In my electorate of Braddon, we have two major regional airports, Burnie and Devonport. Before September 11 we had the most basic of screening processes: hand luggage went through the X-ray container and we had a basic personal security check. That was taken away prior to September 11 for reasons based on aviation regulations for aircraft of under 100-seat capacity, and there were questions of costs involved. After September 11, we still do not have any basic security at our domestic airports; there is none whatsoever. You can literally walk into our terminal with a bag or anything else you want to carry, walk across the tarmac, get onto these aircraft and fly to Melbourne unhindered. There is no basic security at all.

I cannot believe that since September 11, the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, the Bali bombings, the Iraq war, the attempted hijacking of Qantas flight 1737 and now a general aviation security alert there is not a case now to have the most basic form of security at my domestic airports.

Devonport and Burnie airports service a population of about 102,000 citizens. Both airports combined have passenger movements greater than 200,000 per annum, and rising.

Both airports have been determined by the Federal Government as having an aviation security risk: Devonport, category 4 and Burnie, category 5.

Yet neither of these airports have implemented basic passenger security measures.

The airport owners are reluctant to request security reviews to be carried out by the Government as they will then be forced into paying for security upgrades that they cannot afford.

I have had discussions with the Burnie airport owner and they have indicated they would be interested in installing security-screening facilities for passengers and carry on luggage **if** the Federal Government funded the initial installation.

The surplus funds that were collected from the Ansett levy alone would allow the Government to fund these installations in regional airports that are assessed as having a Federal aviation security risk .

TERMS OF REFERENCE

a) Regulation of aviation security by the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services.

Consistency of aviation security throughout Australia is critical to maintaining international standing in the aviation industry and in turn ensuring the highest safeguards for the travelling public.

Aviation security regulation should remain with the Commonwealth to ensure compliance with internationally agreed aviation security regimes, such as the Chicago Convention. This will also ensure consistency within and across Australian jurisdictions.

International and national intelligence is particularly important to determining regulations for aviation security. The Commonwealth is privy to this intelligence and as such is the only logical choice for regulation of aviation security.

b) Compliance with Commonwealth security requirements by airport operators at major and regional airports.

As previously stated the regulations for aviation security should remain with the Commonwealth. Whether the department responsible for aviation security is DoTaRS or a new independent aviation security section, perhaps under CASA, they should be given sufficient powers and staffing to advise, monitor and enforce Government regulations.

Particular attention needs to be drawn to infrastructure funding costs for regional airports, this will be addressed in the terms of reference (e). Unrealistic expenditure costs on regional airports without Commonwealth support will counter the effectiveness of the Commonwealth to play an effective role as advisor, monitor and enforcer of aviation security as regional airport operators may not be able to afford mandated responsibilities.

c) Compliance with Commonwealth security requirements by airlines.

Airline operators and Airport owners have equal responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Commonwealth regulations for aviation security. The Commonwealth should also have monitoring and enforcement roles with regards to airlines meeting aviation security regulations.

d) The impact of overseas security requirements on Australian aviation security.

It is vital the Commonwealth implements and adopts internationally agreed aviation security regulations.

It is a delicate balance between ensuring the safety of the travelling public to the highest level, ensuring Australia's aviation industry is not disadvantaged by perceived inadequacies within the Australian aviation industry in its obligations in meeting international aviation security regulations and yet at the same time not excessively exceeding these requirements to create unwarranted freight and passenger costs.

e) Cost imposts of security upgrades, particularly for regional airports.

In light of the international intelligence warnings and the Government's recent announcement of an increase in risk associated with the Australian aviation industry it seems appropriate to review all airports which have been assessed by DoTaRS as having an aviation security risk.

The Tasmanian Government has recently conducted their own review into security ratings for regional airports and have concluded that the Devonport and Burnie airports should be rated equally with Launceston airport. They have classified all three as a *High* risk. The Commonwealth has classified Launceston Airport as category 3 and as such a reassessment of the classification of Burnie and Devonport airports should also be category 3.

This means basic security measures such as passenger and carry on luggage screening should be adopted. The electronic equipment to achieve this along with infrastructure costs associated with changes to the physical structure to encompass sterile zones is a significant cost to regional airports.

If regional airport owners are forced to bear the brunt of the costs, this will significantly increase costs associated with tickets from these airports and in turn make them uncompetitive with the larger airports.

An example of this is Devonport Airport, which is only a one-hour drive from Launceston Airport. Air travellers may choose to drive to Launceston Airport to make use of the cheaper airfares and as such it is critical Devonport Airport operators keep their costs down.

On the other hand many air travellers may also drive to Launceston to utilise their airport due to the lack of security at Devonport and Burnie airports. The Braddon electorate has shown its desire for increased security by the number of concerned constituents that have contacted my office.

The only realistic way regional airports that have been classified with an aviation security risk can possibly afford the installation of screening equipment is from funding from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth needs to fund all equipment and infrastructure upgrades needed to implement basic security screening at regional airports. This funding could be generated by the surplus funds generated by the pre-existing Ansett levy for example.

Airport owners should look at the funding of ongoing costs such as staffing, equipment maintenance and asset replacement. This could be achieved by implementing a security levy on tickets. As previously mentioned it is critical for regional airports to remain cost competitive against larger airports and as such the amount of this levy should be kept to a minimum. If it is determined that a larger levy is required than that to maintain cost competitiveness then a further annual top up from the Commonwealth may be required.

It is critical for the Australian public and the Commonwealth that the aviation security net across Australia should not be compromised by neglecting security in regional airports.

It is understandable that regional airports do not have the same level of security as our major airports but at the same time it is critical that regional airports categorised as having a security risk by the Commonwealth, implement basic security measures such as passenger and carry on luggage screening.

I note with interest that in the United States the US department of Home Land Security is financially supporting a number of it's airports to offset the costs of introducing enhanced security measures.

Similar demands are being made of the Commonwealth Government by the Sydney Airports Corporation Ltd to use the surplus generated by the Ansett levy which was paid by airline passengers to help fund the capital expenditure for one hundred percent checked baggage screening.

Whilst there is a case for such assistance from the levy I would have thought a greater priority would be to assist regional airports like my own to introduce basic security screening.

f) Privacy implications of greater security measures.

There is always a balance between privacy, passenger throughput and adequate security screening.

The current screening in airports around Australia, other than regional, has been met well by the travelling public. They have an understanding and appreciation of the consequences of not having this security.

As such and since I am seeking only similar passenger and carry on luggage screening equipment that is already in use throughout Australian airports I do not feel this is an issue relevant to regional airports.

g) Opportunities to enhance security measures presented by current and emerging technologies.

As I am seeking security screening for regional airports, any technology is better than no technology, which is what we currently have.

It is important to balance the cost of emerging technologies and staff training with the security risk associated with regional airports. There is a need for security screening in categorised regional airports and this equipment should be state of the art when purchased. Standard asset replacement schedules allow five-year replacement programs as a basis for equipment. This means equipment can be updated to meet emerging technologies every five years.