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ADDENDUM TO RAAA SUBMISSION DATED 04 JULY 2005

Since our Submission was submitted to the Committee, Sir John Wheeler has delivered his report to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister has announced the Government's intentions in relation to that report.

The RAAA believes that Sir John's report strikes the correct balance in the interest of all Australians between the need for security in regional aviation and the adverse economic impacts of unnecessary regulation on a vital part of the nation's infrastructure.

The underlying reality is that any costs imposed on airport operators will be passed on to air service operators. This point has been made in several submissions to the Committee – see for example, the Australian Airports Association submission (submission no. 33). Any costs passed on to air service operators must be passed on to air service users, if they cannot be passed on the service will cease to be viable and will close. BTRE figures (Avline, Oct 2003) show that in the 15 years, 1986 to 2003, 96 regional communities lost their air services. That is, 6 per year. Regional Australia can ill afford to lose more air services due to the costs of misguided security arrangements.

At paragraph 90 of his report Sir John said –

Regional and smaller airports demand more attention. Their importance in Australia should not be underestimated: in many areas they are crucial in sustaining the viability of communities. Yet their operators face an awkward dilemma: they are aware that security measures are necessary to keep public confidence in air travel high, but the increased cost of security measures can threaten their very existence.

The very same dilemma faces air service operators.

Sir John's suggestion of more security awareness training for regional aviation operators by DOTARS, and implicitly in his other remarks funded by the Government, is sensible.

So too is his suggestion of "more comprehensive security control over regional flight passengers arriving at major airports". The "more comprehensive control" requirement may well be met simply by making the existing controls more visible, since it is widely and erroneously believed that unscreened regional passengers have direct access to the major airport sterile areas on arrival. They do not. Unscreended regional passengers are screened on arrival before entering the sterile areas.

The RAAA supports efforts to enhance the security of our nation, but argues that aviation security is simply a sub-set of national defence, aimed at protecting potential targets in major cities, and should not therefore be subsidised by regional Australian passengers. Further the RAAA would also argue that the majority of regional airline aircraft are so small and carry such limited quantities of fuel that they would be almost insignificant as weapons. Thus the security measures required in regional Australia are in no way comparable with those required where large jet aircraft operate.

It would be a great pity if misguided efforts to impose unnecessarily expensive security measures in regional Australia were to result in the loss of air services to the communities that need them the most for their very survival, or if it led to the local airport having, for example, very expensive x-ray equipment for security while the local community was denied adequate x-ray equipment for medical use.

Canberra
7 October 2005