

Question on notice no. 86

Portfolio question number: 477

2017-18 Supplementary budget estimates

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Infrastructure and Regional Development Portfolio

Senator Glenn Sterle: asked the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development on 23 October 2017—

At the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Estimates Hearing on the 23 October 2017, Airservices Australia were questioned about the agreed recommendation to weaken the regulations by raising the threshold for the establishment of an Aviation Rescue and Firefighting Service (ARFFS) from 350,000 passengers to 500,000 passengers per year. At page 141 Mr Harfield states that the threshold for disestablishing an ARFFS at an airport would stay at 300,000 passengers:

Senator GALLACHER: Can I go to the general thrust of firefighting services, and I'll pick on Hamilton Island because I know that, through the Public Works Committee, we just commissioned a new firefighting service there. However, the federal minister and CASA are supporting a raising of the threshold of airports that require firefighting services to 500,000 a year. That will mean that Ballina, Coffs Harbour, Ayres Rock, Gladstone, Hamilton Island, Broome, Karratha, Port Hedland and Newman will all fall under that 500,000. In some of those areas, you've invested significant amounts of taxpayers' money building new stations and I know this from the Public Works Committee. Should that weakening of the regulations go through, what will happen? Will you raze these facilities abandon them and take the firefighters out? **Mr Harfield:** No. With the new threshold of 500,000 to establish a new fire station, there is a disestablishment criterion staying at 300,000 passengers. **Senator GALLACHER:** So if there's an existing facility, it stays? **Mr Harfield:** In the supplementary estimates last year, I was asked that very question. I stated categorically that we would not be closing those stations and then I reiterated that at the May estimates, where I was asked a direct question. I stated in Hansard that we would not be disestablishing any of those stations; they will be staying online. **Senator STERLE:** Even though Newman's just under 300,000? **Mr Harfield:** Even if they go under the disestablishment threshold, we will not be closing those stations. I've publicly reiterated that on a number of occasions.

The Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFFS) Regulatory Policy Review Agreed Recommendation 6 states The ARFFS provider must complete a risk review relating to the possible disestablishment of an ARFFS within six months of the withdrawal of scheduled international passenger air services or the BITRE confirming that passenger numbers have remained below 400,000 for a twelve-month period.

Question:

1. Is the disestablishment trigger remaining at 300,000 passengers per annum as claimed, or is it being changed to 400,000 passengers per annum?

Answer —

Under the proposed new regulation, passenger numbers on scheduled commercial air services falling below 400,000 and remaining below this level for a 12-month period will trigger the requirement for a safety risk review by the Aviation Rescue and Firefighting Service (ARFFS) provider, for consideration and decision by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

However, for ARFFS that existed prior to the new regulation, it will not be necessary to undertake a disestablishment risk review unless the total number of passengers falls below the existing disestablishment threshold of 300,000, and remains below this level for a 12-month period.