



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Reference: Further inquiry into aviation security in Australia

TUESDAY, 7 MARCH 2006

GERALDTON

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JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Tuesday, 7 March 2006

Members: Mr Tony Smith (*Chair*), Ms Grierson (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Hogg, Humphries, Moore, Murray, Nash and Watson and Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Broadbent, Dr Emerson, Ms Jackie Kelly, Ms King, Mr Laming, Mr Tanner and Mr Ticehurst

Senators and members in attendance: Senator Murray and Ms Grierson, Mr Tony Smith and Mr Ticehurst

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- (a) regulation of aviation security by the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, and the Department's response to aviation security incidents since June 2004;
- (b) compliance with Commonwealth security requirements by airport operators at major and regional airports;
- (c) compliance with Commonwealth security requirements by airlines;
- (d) the impact of overseas security requirements on Australian aviation security;
- (e) cost imposts of security upgrades, particularly for regional airports;
- (f) privacy implications of greater security measures;
- (g) opportunities to enhance security measures presented by current and emerging technologies, including measures to combat identity fraud; and
- (h) procedures for, and security of, baggage handling operations at international, domestic and regional airports, by both airlines and airports.

WITNESSES

PERRY, Mr William Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Greenough..... 1

URQUHART, Mr Robert Alexander, Manager, Geraldton Airport 1

Committee met at 10.20 am**PERRY, Mr William Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Greenough****URQUHART, Mr Robert Alexander, Manager, Geraldton Airport**

CHAIR—The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit will now commence taking evidence, as provided for by the Public Accounts and Audit Committee Act 1951, for its ongoing inquiry into aviation security in Australia. I welcome everyone here to today's public hearing for the committee's review of developments in aviation security since the tabling of its Report 400: *Review of aviation security in Australia*. This morning we will hear from representatives of the operator of Geraldton Airport and the Greenough Shire Council.

I advise both witnesses that the hearings today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House or the Senate. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and will attract parliamentary privilege and be published as part of the parliamentary record.

I refer any members of the press who are present to a committee statement about the broadcasting of proceedings. In particular, I draw attention to the need to report fairly and accurately the proceedings of the committee. Copies of this statement are available from the secretariat staff who are with us. I now invite each of the witnesses to make a brief opening statement of three or four minutes. We will then open the hearing up to questions.

Mr Urquhart—Security improvements at Geraldton Airport came into effect with the upgrading of regional aerodromes; I believe that around 160 were upgraded, as it was deemed that their security needed upgrading. As part of the funding allocation of \$35 million by the federal government, through DOTARS, to the Australian Airports Association for its control, Geraldton Airport, after completing a transport security program and a risk assessment of the aerodrome, successfully applied for upgrading of their gate access system, their fencing system and the aerodrome airside lighting system, and we received funding around the value of \$424,000 to implement those parts of the security upgrade. We did apply for some funding for a CCTV system as well, but that was taken over as a further part of the DOTARS funding program, where we were not issued with funding but the contract was given to Paramax Integrated Systems based in Sydney to install a state-of-the-art security CCTV system at selected aerodromes around Australia.

CHAIR—Do you have a rough idea of what that was worth in dollar terms to Geraldton Airport?

Mr Urquhart—Not to Geraldton. I think there were four aerodromes in the system and, from recollection, the grant was about \$3.4 million, so we would get a share of that.

CHAIR—So it might be, at a minimum, \$500,000 or \$600,000?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, possibly \$800,000.

CHAIR—So you could add that to the \$400,000 and we could probably safely say it was more than a million?

Mr Urquhart—We could, yes.

Mr Perry—I have not been involved in the day-to-day operation of this as Bob has been. My involvement has come mainly from the hiccups we have had with the installation and the testing of it. There have been a number of false alarms, which continue to cause problems within the system. But generally it is reasonably effective. The main concern is the number of false alarms, and fortunately they go to Bob first.

Mr Urquhart—Bill gets the reports on them.

Mr Perry—If Bob does not answer them, they come through my phone system.

CHAIR—Generally you have seen a big upgrade, which has been of benefit.

Mr Perry—I think it will be. Once it is all sorted out and the bugs are ironed out of the baggage system, it will be very effective and certainly quite useful in the operation of the Geraldton Airport.

Ms GRIERSON—What is the risk rating of this airport?

Mr Urquhart—I am not sure of the terminology for it, but we are at the stage where we do not have to search passengers or baggage, unless there is a heightened alert. We have had some further DOTARS funding for training of our staff and security agents within the town to do baggage searching and passenger handling.

Ms GRIERSON—So you do own hand wands.

Mr Urquhart—We have the ability to do that. As part of that, I had to become a security manager, under the WA act, and all our officers had to have security licences as well.

Ms GRIERSON—DOTARS would input the need for screening if they thought there was a risk. Is that right?

Mr Urquhart—That is the idea of it. If there is a heightened risk for regional aerodromes, we will be advised and we will be obliged to put baggage and passenger screening in place.

Ms GRIERSON—Have you ever seen or thought that there is a need for it?

Mr Urquhart—Personally, I believe that the money would have been better spent in putting that sort of infrastructure in place at regional aerodromes than how we have spent it.

Ms GRIERSON—You would like to see that; you think it a good first point.

Mr Urquhart—Concerning the passengers' concept of security, the question you get asked most is, 'When I go through Perth Airport or any of the major airports, they take my nail file off me and they make me go through a passenger screening area and they screen my hand baggage. Why don't we do that at regional aerodromes?'

Ms GRIERSON—So there is almost a culture of acceptance now.

Mr Urquhart—Yes, there is. People do not really see an advantage in having CCTV, because it is not obvious to them. They expect fences and lighting. They are the upgrades we have had, which make us as a company or as an operation work more effectively and efficiently. However, the passengers' perception is that, when they board the aircraft, they feel that people should be going through a screening bay and having—not their baggage, because their baggage is okay—screening of the baggage of other people they are travelling with. There is a price for doing that. These days machines that you can walk through for screening are around the \$50,000 mark.

Ms GRIERSON—What about staffing them? Would that be a burden?

Mr Urquhart—Staffing can be a problem but, with the precedents that have been set, it has been put back to the airlines to provide that sort of infrastructure. So from an airport's point of view, no.

CHAIR—Classically, that is for the operator rather than for the airport.

Mr Urquhart—Yes, that is right. As you can see outside, we have security doing exactly that for the operations going out on the helicopter to the oil rigs. If they need it, it is not the aerodrome's responsibility to provide it; it is provided by the actual operator.

Ms GRIERSON—So SkyWest are providing some things here?

Mr Urquhart—SkyWest do not provide anything, but they have allowed one of their staff to be trained. Therefore, if we go to a heightened alert—it is a female, because we did not have any females on our airport staff—she can be involved with the scanning of the passengers or any training that we do.

Ms GRIERSON—Do you have a security committee here?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, we do have a security committee. Under the regulations, we have two meetings a year or a meeting after any incident. So far we have had one meeting.

Ms GRIERSON—Do DOTARS do an annual audit here?

Mr Urquhart—They will do. I do not believe they are far enough progressed in their organisation yet, because this is all relatively new stuff that has been put on them.

Ms GRIERSON—Has the rapid response team ever been here?

Mr Urquhart—They were here over the weekend.

Ms GRIERSON—They must have known that we were coming.

Mr Urquhart—They did. They went back this morning, actually. They have made several trips to Geraldton and they hit Kalbarri yesterday—so, yes.

Ms GRIERSON—Was that useful?

Mr Urquhart—Yes. It is very useful for them to just be known to us and to see what our facilities are. If in the event they are required to operate here, they know the infrastructure. So, yes, I believe it is useful.

CHAIR—Passenger screening obviously takes place at major airports, as you rightly pointed out. Anyone going from Geraldton Airport to Perth Airport, for example—if they were either going to a sterile area of the airport or going to board another flight, say, to Melbourne—would be screened.

Mr Urquhart—Yes.

CHAIR—I just want to be sure about the figures. I read somewhere that about 95 per cent of passengers—

Mr Urquhart—I do not know. All I can say is that we will probably go to 90,000-odd-plus passengers this year and ours are not screened.

Ms GRIERSON—The only direct flight from here is Perth. Is that right?

Mr Urquhart—No. We have flights through to Carnarvon and Kalbarri.

Ms GRIERSON—But your big capital city is Perth.

Mr Urquhart—Yes, the big capital city we fly into is Perth.

Ms GRIERSON—Basically you could take anything through.

Mr Urquhart—You are asked to declare anything, so honest people should declare—as should anyone. There are certain questions asked at the check-in counter for a declaration. So clearly you are committing an offence if you board an aircraft with anything. But that is the only system that is in place at this stage.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Urquhart, you are telling us that somebody could come into this airport and go out to a rig without having their baggage checked or their person being checked?

Mr Urquhart—No. If they are going out to the rigs, the rigs have their own security in place.

CHAIR—Do they pay for that themselves?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, they pay for that themselves and they insist on it.

Senator MURRAY—Do they have screening?

Mr Urquhart—They actually screen all the hand baggage; they do not screen the passengers. So the passengers could board the aircraft with something on their person.

CHAIR—But the rigs themselves determine their own screening processes.

Mr Urquhart—They do, yes.

Senator MURRAY—Where does that occur?

Mr Urquhart—Just in the reception down here.

Senator MURRAY—So there are screening facilities available?

Mr Urquhart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—They are only used by the rig companies?

Mr Urquhart—At this stage, because of our training, we now have a range of screening facilities, so we can hand screen the hand baggage. We will be practising on that in the near future.

CHAIR—So you could do that?

Mr Urquhart—That has been supplied by DOTARS. We have an equipment room down there.

CHAIR—Could you tell us a little about that?

Mr Urquhart—Yes.

Ms GRIERSON—Is ETD part of it too, for trace detection of explosives?

Mr Urquhart—No, we do not have that. That will come under the next upgrade—and that is the classification whose name I was not sure of. If you go to a jet service, you are obliged to screen everyone who goes through your terminal.

CHAIR—That is the hook for it, isn't it?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, a jet service is the hook for it. However, we have turbo prop jets.

CHAIR—That is your argument. You have been provided with some capacity.

Mr Urquhart—DOTARS have provided us with training through Vast Academy in Sydney. They have provided six days of training on security to all regional aerodromes including Geraldton, and then, as I say, we have to go—

CHAIR—That is the wands.

Mr Urquhart—It is wanding and physical techniques for searching hand baggage. So, instead of putting it through a scanner, you physically open the bag.

CHAIR—You have a queue and tables.

Mr Urquhart—We have most of that. All that has been supplied to us, but some of it has not arrived.

CHAIR—When all of that is in place and up and running—

Mr Urquhart—Yes, we can do it.

Senator MURRAY—The rig people's entire process is manual. Is that right?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, it is manual.

Senator MURRAY—There is no screening machine?

Mr Urquhart—No. The only thing that the rig insists on out of Geraldton is that hand baggage is checked, both in and out.

Senator MURRAY—Is that wanded or just checked physically?

Mr Urquhart—Just checked physically.

Senator MURRAY—But that is a real weakness, isn't it, because the camera system will show up what the hands cannot see?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, that is right.

Ms GRIERSON—What do you think is the main thing they are looking for?

Mr Urquhart—The oil rigs? I do not know.

Ms GRIERSON—Drugs or contraband?

Mr Urquhart—They could be looking for any of that, or people could be stealing expensive tools off the rig, which could be checked for on the way in.

CHAIR—How long have they been doing it?

Mr Urquhart—This contract is for about six months.

CHAIR—But, in the whole scheme of things, has it been forever and a day?

Mr Urquhart—Oil rigs have always done it.

CHAIR—So that is not new.

Mr Urquhart—No, it is not new.

Ms GRIERSON—Do you know what has been picked up in those searches? Have there been any trends?

Mr Urquhart—As an airport, we do not facilitate that. However, if anything was picked up that contravened our transport security program, we should be advised; but I have not been advised of anything.

Senator MURRAY—Have the rig people asked for increased security? Are they interested in having proper electronic scanners as well as the doorways and so on? Are they content with their system?

Mr Urquhart—No, we have not been asked for electronic scanners.

Senator MURRAY—Turning to the question of what you have upgraded, a facility like this would always have had criminal activity and hoons coming on to the field and so on. Since you have lifted your security, have you caught more people? Have there been more instances whereby you have stopped people doing things that used to occur? Have you seen a reflection in your statistics as a result of having better lighting, better fencing and gate facilities and all that sort of thing?

Mr Urquhart—We have been better able to investigate wrongdoings. Quite often with CCTV, it is after the event. We had an incident here with the shadow Premier, who was shadow minister for police at the time. He left his bag unattended at the carousel and somebody inadvertently picked it up and took it away. We could then use the CCTV to see who took the bag.

Senator MURRAY—Are you able to measure in any way the benefit of this increased security, or is it too early to tell?

Mr Perry—Certainly the gate security has made a difference.

Mr Urquhart—The gate security has made a huge difference.

Mr Perry—A number of vehicles in the car park had been vandalised. People were coming in and finding their cars vandalised. In one case a car was set up on paving bricks, which had been used as a jack, and all its wheels had been taken off. Those sorts of things were happening. The installation of the electronic gate, which was really before this security came into being, has eliminated a lot of that. After the last flight at 9.30 or 10 o'clock at night, that gate closes and it is not opened again until the morning, so people cannot drive in and out as they did before. That certainly has reduced the amount of vandalism.

Mr Urquhart—That has also happened with the airside. Since we have taken the step of putting electronic gates on the airside, people now do not have random access. We used to have a lot of vehicles that would drive on to the airside.

Senator MURRAY—And hoon about.

Mr Urquhart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Communications is always a big issue in terms of monitoring a site or reporting or responding to an incident. Are all your communications here above-ground lines, or do you have below-ground communications lines coming in? Do you have broadband coming into this facility?

Mr Urquhart—For the security system that we are using, they laid optical fibre cable from the main gates at the entrance of the airport right up into the terminal here. With the upgrading of the CCTV system, which has 30-odd cameras, it is all very fast. The monitoring system from there on in is very slow because we are still using a telephone line to do it.

Senator MURRAY—So you need Telstra to do a broadband connection?

Mr Urquhart—Telstra have been promising that we would have a broadband connection here by the middle of February, but that is just ongoing. If you ask anyone, it does not happen. But we now have a wireless broadband connection down to our works depot, which is part of the shire as well—that is just down at the entrance—and that is working effectively. This system could be upgraded. It hasn't been, but it could be and should be upgraded to a broadband system, whether microwave or whatever.

Senator MURRAY—Do you have a stand-alone satellite communications system here?

Mr Urquhart—We do not have one here. Some of the other operators at the aerodrome have; they have installed them themselves. But that has not been part of our upgrade.

Mr TICEHURST—How many people on the airport have ASIC cards?

Mr Urquhart—As part of its transport security program, Geraldton Airport issues its own ASIC cards. I think I have issued about 60 to date.

Mr TICEHURST—Do any contractors working on the airside not have ASICs?

Mr Urquhart—At this stage, yes, but the ASIC card does not come into play for us until 1 April. After 1 April, they will be issued to anyone going airside. Even you would have to be issued with a visitor's card and at all times be escorted by an ASIC holder.

CHAIR—Where they do not have an ASIC card—

Mr Urquhart—They have to be escorted.

CHAIR—They have to be supervised.

Mr Urquhart—We have a yellow visitor's card and anyone going airside has to be supervised.

CHAIR—Just on that point, generally you would say that anyone with a visitor's card is properly supervised?

Mr Urquhart—They should be.

CHAIR—They are the responsibility of the person with the ASIC card?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, that is it. The only other way of people going airside is if they have come off an aircraft. The pilot should have an ASIC card and is obliged to escort the passengers to and from the aircraft.

Mr TICEHURST—Would your visitor's pass have a photo ID?

Mr Urquhart—No. It is a standard template that has been produced by DOTARS. Basically, it is the same as my red one but it does not have an ID. In fact, we have our Geraldton Airport logo on there so that we can recognise that it is an ASIC or a visitor's card for Geraldton Airport. Potentially, because they are standard issue, you could have somebody turn up from Kalbarri and use their Kalbarri visitor's card to go airside, where effectively we can only issue them to our own people.

Mr TICEHURST—When you say that you issue them here, what sorts of security checks do you do?

Mr Urquhart—For ASIC cards, there is a standard set that the person applies. It is very similar to the process for an Australian passport that you would get from a post office. They have an interview with me and I take down their identification details; it is the standard 100-point check. They have to have either a current Australian passport or a previous ASIC card. I take down their drivers licence details, their address details and their previous addresses over the last five years. That information is then sent off to the Australian Federal Police, although there is a new system coming into effect from 6 March, I think, where DOTARS have set up their own vetting facility. But at this stage I send it off to the Australian Federal Police and they do an ASIO check, a Federal Police check et cetera. They then come back to me, not with an okay but saying that they see no reason, without fingerprints—because we do not send fingerprints off—that the person should not have an ASIC. They may come back saying, 'This person has offences under these things,' and then it is left up to us to ascertain whether we should still issue an ASIC. Also, if they are not Australian citizens, we have to have a clearance from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, DIMIA. So we send it off to them and get a clearance from them. The only problem I have had to date is people who are New Zealanders who have come into Australia before there was the requirement to have a passport.

Mr TICEHURST—Does your CCTV have a motion-triggered alarm?

Mr Urquhart—There are no alarms on the CCTV as such. When the cameras are working properly, if any of the gate accesses are accessed, one of the cameras will swing around and look at that gate and take a movie of the person using it. There are no alarms as such on the cameras,

but the cameras are set up also to record movement. If we had time, I could show you the little blue squares that come up. You set that up for the number of pixels in the camera.

Mr TICEHURST—When you say that you are getting false alarms off the new security, what is triggering them?

Mr Urquhart—False alarms have been mainly on the access control system. As I say, there are no alarms on the CCTV. On the access control system, they believe that they have had faulty readers where you swipe the card across and they have been showing tamper alarms. This has been ongoing for quite some time. They worked on the tamper alarms over the last weekend trying to sort them out. Hopefully that will have fixed them.

CHAIR—Do you hear through back channels that that is a common thing? Obviously they are installed at more than one airport.

Mr Urquhart—No, I do not know.

CHAIR—It is like a glitch on the latest model Holden.

Mr Urquhart—I think it is a glitch on the latest model whatever it is. That is what they have told me. I am not an expert on the alarm system. They have told me that they have replaced the swipes, as we may have got a faulty batch. I was out there with them yesterday. It just happened yesterday that they replaced the batches and then we had a couple of alarms overnight, which were related to other things.

Mr TICEHURST—What is the length of your runway?

Mr Urquhart—It is 1,981 meters, almost two kilometres.

Mr TICEHURST—Can you handle 737s?

Mr Urquhart—Yes, we can handle 737s without any trouble.

Mr Perry—The 737-800 series. The runway was upgraded about three years ago. We put an average of 75 millimetres of premix on top of it, with a PCM rating from about 14 up to 34. That certainly enables us to take larger aircraft.

CHAIR—From the shire's point of view, in a general sense, obviously over the last few years there has been an increased need for security, and an increased cost goes with that. The Commonwealth obviously has a major burden if they do it. Do you think operators have a role to play as well? I am talking not about what we have been talking about but about going forward.

Mr Perry—Certainly the operators have the costs of day-to-day policing of the security and of the operation of the airport itself. In rural airports generally, I think cost will become a major factor. Once you start employing people to use wands or equipment—

CHAIR—That is what I was getting at. There will be a burden on shires as well.

Mr Perry—Yes.

CHAIR—The state obviously have their infrastructure with police and what not. Equipment can be provided, and that is one thing.

Mr Perry—The equipment itself is quite expensive to buy in the first place, particularly for machines that X-ray baggage, as happens in Perth. I think people generally accept that they will be X-rayed or that their bags will be X-rayed as they go through the airports. In my case I travel backwards and forwards to Perth frequently. I just accept that I will be going through a security check. I have steel caps on my boots and they go off every time; I have to take them off and put them through separately. The cost factor will be a big one, particularly with smaller aircraft. This one is a reasonable size and will make some profit to finance additional cost, but a lot of the smaller airports just do not have the resources to go down that path.

Mr TICEHURST—You have to balance the risk and that expenditure and what it achieves; you really have to take that into account.

Mr Perry—Yes.

Ms GRIERSON—What communication method is used with DOTARS? Does the shire have communications with them?

Mr Perry—We have communications primarily through Bob as airport manager.

Ms GRIERSON—Do you have any problems with general aviation? They all have to get their ASICs eventually.

Mr Urquhart—General aviation needs to fall in line. One of the things that came up with the rapid response team over the weekend was that there is an obligation now for all general aviation aircraft to have some sort of locking device on their aircraft when it is unattended. But there is a conflict in the regulations in that you cannot interfere with an aircraft. So, unless the locking device is on the front wheel, which some of them have, you would not know whether they were locked or not.

Ms GRIERSON—It is good that they have picked that up.

CHAIR—Yours has been great evidence to get at the start of what is a three-day tour to six different locations. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for giving us a tour and for making yourselves available today. If you think of anything later that you would have liked to have said and you want to make a supplementary submission, please feel free to do so. You can do that in writing and then contact the secretariat and that will be taken as a supplementary submission.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Grierson**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 10.45 am

