



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

KALBARRI

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT



## **INTERNET**

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to:  
**<http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>**

## JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Tuesday, 7 March 2006

**Members:** Mr Tony Smith (*Chair*), Ms Grierson (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Hogg, Humphries, Moore, 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 Mrs 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**

**KEEFFE, Mr Garry Leonard, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Northampton ..... 1**

**PARKER, Mr George Victor, President, Shire of Northampton ..... 1**



---

**Committee met at 12.45 pm****KEEFFE, Mr Garry Leonard, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Northampton****PARKER, Mr George Victor, President, Shire of Northampton**

**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 afternoon we will hear from representatives of Shire of Northampton who, together with the Shire of Greenough, operate Kalbarri Airport.

I advise the 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 may or may not be present—to a committee statement about the broadcasting of proceedings.

Given our time constraints, Garry, would you like to make a brief opening statement and then we will ask some questions.

**Mr Keffe**— Yes, I will make a brief opening statement. From my point of view and that of the airport administration, the security requirements were very much a knee-jerk reaction to world events. In my opinion, with the Kalbarri Airport and similar airports, there should have been more thought about what needed to be done compared with larger regional airports. The only reason we got caught up in it was that we have an RPT service. That is about as brief as I can be. I will elaborate further later on.

**Mr Parker**—I endorse what Garry has said. Garry has had to wear most of it. He has had to do the training courses and all that sort of thing. When you lose five staff for a whole week to knuckle down and do a training course to keep kangaroos and flies out of an airport, it seems to be a bit of a waste of money to me.

**CHAIR**—Obviously you would acknowledge the need for increased security and for the federal government to fund that, and that that has been a good thing and that the \$35 million that has been spent was a good thing to do. But your point is that you think there could have been a greater distinction made between some of the regional airports?

**Mr Keffe**— Yes, absolutely.

**CHAIR**—Please take us through the process from your point of view. You were sitting there as the CEO.

**Mr Keffe**—The biggest problem with the start of the process is what I have said. They dived in too quickly and they classed all the airports involved as the same. I believe that we would be in the same class as Greenough, Perth and Sydney. The only difference between us and

Greenough, I believe, is that we did not put up cameras. They have to do all the other stuff, such as baggage screening et cetera. For example, for our original estimate we had a qualified security consultant come to check out our airport.

**Ms GRIERSON**—At your cost?

**Mr Keefe**—At our cost, yes. That is not recoverable, we have discovered.

**Senator MURRAY**—Did any government bureaucrat from Canberra or DOTARS, the department of transport, come to inspect the airport first?

**Mr Keefe**— No.

**Mr Parker**—Not that we know of.

**Mr Keefe**—Not that I know of. It was only done by our consultant, who is based in Geraldton.

**Senator MURRAY**—There was a kind of a desktop classification.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. I quizzed a fair few of the issues raised by the consultant because he was not aware of what was going on. Two of my main bugbears still are an intruder alarm system for the terminal and coded security locks.

**CHAIR**—Take us through the process from your point of view. If I take you back, you were sitting there as the CEO and you heard about the funding. What was your first contact?

**Mr Keefe**—The first contact was advice from DOTARS saying that I had to get my airport inspected by a licensed security agent and send the report into DOTARS for consideration.

**CHAIR**—That report got sent in recommending certain things?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. It recommended the items that we have done. I think there was one thing that was not done—sorry, it was done. That was the DOTARS requirement for signage. It just was not included in the—

**CHAIR**—That would be a fairly standard thing.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—The consultant came up and spent how long here?

**Mr Keefe**— I would not have a clue. I did not follow him. I just engaged him and told him to get up here.

**CHAIR**—So he advised fences?



**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. He advised fences, alarm systems, the gates and the telephone service.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Was the lighting already there?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes, it was.

**Mr Parker**—It is all automatic.

**CHAIR**—What sort of traffic do you get through here?

**Mr Keeffe**—At the time of the security requirements, it was pretty low. The RPT service had been operating since we started the airport.

**Mr Parker**—That was Skipper Aviation then.

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. From the start, when the airport was first built, we had an RPT service that was subsidised by the state government but it could only carry nine passengers. Then it was put out to tender and Skipper Aviation started and that is when all this came in. They had aircraft flying in with less than 30-seat capacity, so we did not have to bother with some of the security requirements. Now we have aircraft with 30-plus seat capacity coming in. At the moment with Skywest, there are three flights per week and they are averaging about 30 passengers per flight. That is expected to double, once we get the resort up.

**CHAIR**—That is Skywest.

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How many a day would come in?

**Mr Parker**—Light aircraft.

**Mr Keeffe**—Two a week, if we are lucky.

**CHAIR**—George referred to light aircraft. There might be a couple of light aircraft?

**Mr Parker**—That varies a bit. At the weekend they might get a few from local aero clubs at Geraldton and things like that. Then you get a few station people who come over for the holidays in Kalbarri and things like that. But we do not really have a record of them.

**Ms GRIERSON**—If you have coded locks, what will happen? There is an honour system there, obviously, to pay your landing fees.

**Mr Keeffe**— Yes. This is a really tricky situation and I raised it at a security seminar meeting. You have coded locks and the idea is that no-one can gain access to airside; therefore, you need to tell the pilots how to get out of the gate. Originally it was planned to be published in ERSA and that has now been disallowed by DOTARS. The only option that we have available is to put a sign near the gate facing the airside with a number for the lock. But some members of

DOTARS are saying that the pilot should find out first before he lands. That is not always going to be the case.

**Mr Parker**—But, with air traffic, I do not think we have mentioned the charter operator working out here.

**Mr Keefe**— I will go back to the numbers. At the moment there are three RPT flights per week and they average 30 per flight. In general aviation, last financial year we incomed \$600 and it is \$10 to land, so that was 60 flights for the year. We also have the air charter operating. During peak seasons he would do a flight a day, if he is lucky. Now he would do one flight per month because there are no tourists in the area at this time of the year. That is very seasonal work. Also included in general aviation, by the way, are RAAF flights, and we do not have that distinguished in our books. The reason for the large number in the last financial year was that there were some 100-odd planes that came through on an air club rally.

**CHAIR**—Bike rally, car rally, plane rally.

**Mr Keefe**— It was a plane rally raising money for the RFDS and half of them landed here and the other half landed in Geraldton.

**CHAIR**—That was a one-off.

**Mr Keefe**— Yes. So there are 50 planes a year, if you like, in general aviation.

**Ms GRIERSON**—In that time, have you ever had any incidents?

**Mr Keefe**—We have only had one incident but not at that airport. It was at the old airport. The white crosses were on the airstrip and a learner pilot thought it was the airport and landed the plane and tipped it up. That is the only incident that we have had.

**CHAIR**—Where did he land the plane?

**Mr Keefe**— On the old airstrip.

**Mr Parker**—We had an old airstrip down south of town. It is still there.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, it is still there. It is covered in regrowth, but you can see the strip in there.

**Mr Parker**—It had the white crosses and all on it, but he still tried to land.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Is it used for emergency services at all?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, emergency services is probably its biggest hit. The old airport was only 913 metres long with a gravel base. The new RFDS long-range planes could not land on it.

**Ms GRIERSON**—You would not want your emergency services needing to have a code.

**Mr Keefe**—They will be given the code. They all have a key now.

**Mr TICEHURST**—They would have the code, wouldn't they?

**Mr Keefe**—They will be given the code. All of those people will be given the code. The ambulance, the fire brigade and the police all have keys at the moment. We tell them, 'If you are involved in an emergency and you cannot find a key, just cut that chain.' The chain is only worth a couple of bucks.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Can you get into the terminal if you want to?

**Mr Keefe**—The terminal is always open during the day and it is closed at night. It is closed at night because it became a free caravan park. After it was built, it became well known as a free caravan park, so we started closing it.

**Ms GRIERSON**—And now the phone is there, which would be essential to getting in and out.

**Mr Keefe**—The phone that is there has been operating since the airport was built and is a local mobile service straight to Kalbarri so that any pilot who comes in unannounced can get transport to and from the airport to here.

**Mr Parker**—So it is only local calls.

**Mr Keefe**—It is only local calls. But the STD phones have now been put in only to be used by the people from Skywest and emergency services, not the general public.

**Ms GRIERSON**—So how will that happen? It is just an open—

**Mr Parker**—There is a locked room in the terminal.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, there is a locked room. That is sitting there at the moment. It was all installed and going until last Friday, when it did not work—and we do not know why. That is part of the security things that we have to put in place.

**Senator MURRAY**—If someone had said to you, 'We need to increase security, but you make the decision; it is up to the shire as to what security you do,' what would you have done that is different?

**Mr Keefe**—For the airport, we probably would have done the fence but not that type of fence. The fence I would have put in is a small-scale industrial commercial fence, similar to the one that Geraldton has. Certainly we would have put in the telephone; there is no doubt about that. The rest I would not have bothered with.

**CHAIR**—Did the consultant allow you any sort of room for discussion? We have just seen the one at Geraldton.

**Mr Keefe**— I just made a comment about it. I am just trying to recall what he said. I commented that I did not believe it was necessary and so on. But I understood that, with the direction that I got from DOTARS, I really did not have a say. Whatever the consultant said we had to submit the funding for. That is how I took it—it is a direction, it is under the aviation act and I have to abide by it.

**CHAIR**—Did the same consultant do Geraldton?

**Mr Keefe**— I believe he did, yes, because I asked him whether he could do ours—and he did.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did you get it all funded?

**Mr Keefe**— The consultancy itself we had to pay for, but the rest of it we had all funded.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did it take a long time?

**Mr Keefe**— Yes. Originally it was \$52,000 all up and then we had to go and get two quotes—that was another problem—after we had submitted our estimate. We could not get two quotes for the intruder alarm system, because one bloke kept refusing to drive all the way to Kalbarri to have a look, even though we offered to pay. We got three quotes for the fence, which was fine. We could not get a quote for the phone system, because it had to be built. It is not a system that you can buy off the shelf, so that had to be built.

**CHAIR**—Mr Parker, I know that you have a funeral to attend. Thank you very much for your time.

**Mr Keefe**—So we got all of that together and the quotes came out cheaper. One particular reason for the quotes coming out cheaper was the fence itself. The fence came out some \$20,000 cheaper. Why, I do not know. The consultant estimated that it would cost \$52,000 and, when we started getting the quotes, it was far cheaper. The consultant for the fence, we discovered, used a Geraldton based contractor and a Perth based contractor, so there were miles of travel costs. We used a local guy to put it in.

**Mr TICEHURST**—That was much better, was it?

**Mr Keefe**—It certainly was—about \$20,000. The thing we did find though was that our intruder alarm system, which he estimated at \$5,000, including all the locks, was about \$8,000, and it will now cost us about \$16,000.

**Ms GRIERSON**—What is wear and tear like out here? Does equipment stay in good repair?

**Mr Keefe**—It does out there because it gets minimal salt, although I have just noticed my terminal is pitting a bit on the structures, but we will find out what is happening there. The equipment in that room is pretty secure and it is not a problem.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Do you get pilfering or vandalism?

**Mr Keeffe**—We got one lot of vandalism when the airport first opened, but we have not had any since. The airport is inspected daily, with the air charter out there.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Who does that? Do you do that?

**Mr Keeffe**— My ranger just goes out and has a look.

**Senator MURRAY**—Is that the shire ranger with the national park?

**Mr Keeffe**—No. I have four work staff here in Kalbarri, one of whom is my ranger. Three are trained reporting officers, under the airport requirements, and they do the annual daily inspections. Now, with the airport being licensed, we have to do certain inspections each day of the lights and everything like that.

**CHAIR**—So you are really saying that you thought getting a fence was a good idea?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You are not happy with the one you have.

**Mr Keeffe**—I would have done it a little differently; that is all I am saying. If you are talking about security, that fence will not hold anybody; in fact, it will help them to climb over. You have a top bar and chain-link mesh.

**CHAIR**—Would he agree to having barbed wire on top?

**Mr Keeffe**—That is an interesting one. When we had the original fence there, we were going to put barbed wire on top of it but our concern was about liability with kids and other questions.

**Ms GRIERSON**—You would be liable.

**Mr Keeffe**—We would be liable. But I am saying that the top of that fence should have had curves coming over it with the barbed wire. That prevents a person from climbing over.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did you have any money left over so that you perhaps could have done that?

**Mr Keeffe**—No, we do not have any money left over. We are still doing ours. Our budget is \$38,880 now. As I understand it, if I do not expend that money, I have to give it back. If I go over, I can try to make a claim.

**Senator MURRAY**—You commented earlier on the signs. I think you mentioned 112 signs.

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—It seems daft on the face of it. Does the fact that the signs are there give the police or security more powers, because it is a designated area? Is there some other reason that we are not sure of? It seems daft to me, but perhaps there is another reason.

**Mr Keefe**—I do not have a problem with signs being where your main activity is, but I do not see the point of having signs stuck up at the southern end of the airport.

**Mr TICEHURST**—You would probably find that there is a legal requirement to have the signs.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, it is a requirement under the act to have so many signs per so many metres.

**Mr TICEHURST**—It is ridiculous really.

**Mr Keefe**—That is why there are so many signs. We had to measure it out. The requirement is one every 30 metres, if I remember rightly.

**Senator MURRAY**—That would make sense in a metropolitan airport; it does not make sense here.

**Mr Keefe**—We had standard signs up on three gates and one at each end a bit further away from the gate. They were standard warning signs: ‘Danger—Authorised Personnel Only’. You will see one when you go out; there is a little one still on the pedestrian gate. There are bigger ones spread around the place.

**CHAIR**—How would you get around to the other side?

**Mr Keefe**—You can only do so by driving or walking. Around the whole fence line is a track that we must maintain.

**CHAIR**—Do people drive on it?

**Mr Keefe**—No, we do not have—

**Ms GRIERSON**—Do many self-drive tourists come here?

**Mr Keefe**—No, I have never had it reported to me. It is pretty rugged and it wrecks our vehicles. I cannot imagine that tourists would want to be out there. Why you would go there I would never know.

**Ms GRIERSON**—So there are no roads through the national park?

**Mr Keefe**—No, there are no roads through there at all. It is very strict. The whole airport is operated on a minister’s directive for the environment, so it is very strict as to what we are and are not allowed to do out there. For example, there are no grasses, you will notice—none of that. No big trees for shade are allowed to be grown. We have to have the airport assessed by an environmentalist every year.

**CHAIR**—Because are you in a national park?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. So the less prominent we make our tracks around the fences, the better. It reduces the access.

**Mr TICEHURST**—How do you handle the passengers when they are coming in or going out?

**Mr Keefe**—I have no idea. That is Skywest's problem, not our problem. Skywest train personnel up here, the manager of the motel, and the tourist bureau staff do all the bookings now. That has only started happening since January, by the way. No, we do not do it.

**Mr TICEHURST**—So any screening or checking that is done is up to them?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**Ms GRIERSON**—You came out to greet us, but that would not happen normally?

**Mr Keefe**—No. I guess they must have some clearance from their passengers, but I do not know. We are not required to do anything about it, under aviation act.

**Senator MURRAY**—Could you confirm for the record that, both before and after the work was done, apart from the consultant, nobody came to inspect that airport?

**Mr Keefe**—No.

**Senator MURRAY**—No-one?

**Mr Keefe**—Sorry; not in regard to security, but we have had CASA and those sorts of people come up purely because the airport has been licensed and they have recognised that security measures have been put in place for the airport licence.

**Ms GRIERSON**—But that is not—

**Mr Keefe**—Not from DOTARS, no.

**Mr TICEHURST**—Does the consultant—

**Mr Keefe**—As far as I am concerned, the consultant has finished. Once he gave the report, that was it.

**CHAIR**—Do you acquit to the department of—

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, we do a declaration.

**CHAIR**—That is an important point. In a glib sense, you can say, ‘The consultant came out and we have not seen him since,’ but the line of responsibility is that the consultant determines what work need to be done.

**Mr Keeffe**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—You get them done?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You do a declaration to DOTARS?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes, on the acquittal.

**CHAIR**—So you are the trusted official?

**Mr Keeffe**—That is correct. I understand they are doing spot audits though; I have been advised of that. Spot audits are being done.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did the rapid response team come here?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. They have been here more than once. They have been here a couple of times.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did they make contact?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes, they contact me and say, ‘This is top secret; do not tell anybody.’ They were here last weekend. They let me know when they are coming and all I do is tell my ranger. I say to him, ‘We have a top-secret job coming again,’ and he says, ‘Oh, the feds are coming?’ and I say yes. They tell us purely so we know that there will be people snooping around and running around out in the bush or something. At the airport I do not know what they do. They do advise us. They have been up here twice.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Did they leave any written report?

**Mr Keeffe**—No. They obviously do the exercise to see what happens, but I have not received a report from them. I might get one after this week; I am not sure.

**Mr TICEHURST**—Where is the main link to other airports from here; where would people be travelling to?

**Mr Keeffe**—On the RPT service it is direct to Perth or Carnarvon.

**Ms GRIERSON**—As CEO and also having responsibility for the airport, what training did you have?

**Mr Keeffe**—None. I was thrown in at the deep end and it was learn or sink.



**CHAIR**—You did a course though?

**Mr Keeffe**—Then I did a course for the security officer's and the security agent's licence. Officially, because the airport was not licensed at the time, the CEO is the manager of the airport. So I had to take on the manager's responsibility for the airport.

**Ms GRIERSON**—And a commercial firm provides that course?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—But, under the new regime, you are all required to undertake that course if you do not have that qualification?

**Mr Keeffe**—That is correct.

**CHAIR**—Whereas previously you did not have to?

**Mr Keeffe**—That is right. We all did it.

**Senator MURRAY**—Where did you do it?

**Mr Keeffe**—Right here in this room.

**Senator MURRAY**—Did somebody fly up to do it with you?

**Mr Keeffe**—No. A company called Vast Academy, which was engaged by DOTARS, did it Australia-wide. It won the tender to do it Australia-wide.

**CHAIR**—So they did hundreds?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes—Greenough, Carnarvon.

**CHAIR**—There are 140 new ones.

**Mr Keeffe**—I know that they did all of Western Australia.

**Ms GRIERSON**—So how many other people did the training and who were they—your ranger?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. The training was done by me, my deputy CEO—because, when I am away, he is responsible—and the four staff members up here. The six of us did it. While doing the course, they realised that it could be cut in half quite easily—although, whether they have done that, I do not know. They concentrated a lot on crowd control and issues like that, whereas out in the terminal there are three magnetic wands. If the Prime Minister calls a code 5 security alert, we shut the airport down. All of us must be up here on deck. The airport is shut down and we have to go through the formal security checks. So for everybody coming in on an RPT or

anybody else, the terminal is set up; it has a table, screenings and everything, which have all been supplied through DOTARS. The ranger checks the batteries once a month.

**Ms GRIERSON**—And that is there all the time?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. That was a result of the training—learning how to screen people.

**Ms GRIERSON**—What are your projections for increased passenger movement through the airport?

**Mr Keefe**—It will increase; there is no doubt about it.

**CHAIR**—Because of tourism demand?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. One of the factors is the brand new resort that is being built up here. It is targeted at international tourists. The developer has indicated to us that the target will be to fly them in in their droves. So we hope and expect that in the next two to three years it will grow. If it does not, the airport will lose money on this, and that is not our aim.

**Ms GRIERSON**—You may become a marriage celebrant as well; you may bring in couples to be married and all sorts of things.

**Mr Keefe**—I do not know about that. I do not know that I will be here.

**CHAIR**—I do not think that course is five days.

**Mr Keefe**—That five-day course was pretty intense.

**CHAIR**—The traffic volumes that will occur with this resort will change the nature of the airport. So I guess the point you make has some merit: a small airport should be treated the same as all the other regional ones. There is every chance—and this is one of the things I was talking about earlier with my friend and colleague Senator Murray—that, having had stage 1 and with upgrades and changes never ending as populations change, going forward you may well need some more funding—

**Mr Keefe**—Possibly.

**CHAIR**—As your circumstances change and your traffic flows change. Areas like this, fantastic parts of Australia, as you know, can take off with the click of the fingers and can become a Broome or something else. Obviously it will not grow as big as that, but as a tourist destination it can become the latest and greatest thing. In that circumstance you would need to have pretty ready access to some further measures, I would think.

**Mr Keefe**—My response to that would be though that, if you relate security to terrorism, which I believe is what this is all about—

**CHAIR**—Not just that.

**Mr Keeffe**—That is what was in letters we got from DOTARS and so on.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is obviously the big front and centre issue.

**Mr Keeffe**—Exactly. It all happened after 9-11 and after London. The reason I believe it was a knee-jerk reaction—and this is my opinion only—is that the PM was in both of those places when the events occurred, so his security people said, ‘We’ve got to do something about it.’ I think terrorists are a bit smarter than to use aircraft in little airfields like ours. For a start, they will not get any aircraft, because there are only two out there if you are lucky and they are Cessnas. Your more important big fish will be targeted—the northern shelf and stuff like that. That is who you have to look at. There needs to be continual review, but I believe it is no good to have knee-jerk reactions, spending millions and millions of dollars, without first thinking, ‘Hang on, this airport is this big now and its projections are that it will not get that big for at least 10 or plus years; these are the security arrangements we think should be put in here.’

**CHAIR**—But just on that, to be equally curt in reply, you say that you got a fence but you wanted a different kind of fence and you got a whole lot of signs but you did not think they needed to be everywhere. So, when it is all boiled down, there is not that much difference, is there?

**Mr Keeffe**—Coded locks is a bit of a farce too.

**Ms GRIERSON**—But, if you were thinking safety as well as security, what else would you want?

**Mr Keeffe**—To put down a permanent power supply to the site.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Permanent power, communications and—

**CHAIR**—That is half a million dollars.

**Mr Keeffe**—When we built it, it was half a million—plus that did not include the costs for all the clearances to go through the national park.

**Ms GRIERSON**—That would be a bureaucratic nightmare.

**Mr Keeffe**—That would take another consultative environmental review process. The airport cost for that alone was \$138,000—big dollars. They just estimated that on aerial too. I doubt that you are allowed to put aerial out there.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Has Skywest or anyone else contributed anything to the airport?

**Mr Keeffe**—Only the landing fees.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Have they asked you for any extra facilities or are they interested in any?

**Mr Keefe**—No, they have not at this stage. All we have given approval for lately is to build a shed on site to house their equipment. It is stuck in my office at the moment and I want to get it out. But it is their responsibility to build all that. At the moment we actually do not charge them.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Is there anything else they should pick up, do you think?

**Mr Keefe**—You could ask any airport owner and they would reckon aircraft operators should own the airport instead of us having to run it at a loss. At the moment, just to be fair to Skywest, the two councils see it as our having to promote Skywest to make sure it is viable. So at the moment we just charge a \$10 passenger service fee. We do not charge them a landing fee as per take-off weight, as Geraldton do. It is purely that we need to make them viable and keep them going—because if we have no income coming in—

**Ms GRIERSON**—You are trying to build an industry.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—When DOTARS contacted you, did they at any time ask you what you thought you needed in terms of security?

**Mr Keefe**—Not that I can recall, no.

**Senator MURRAY**—It would seem to me that the very basic elements of security are a reliable pass system and a reliable communications system—

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—And the essentials of security, which are fences and so on.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—You lack a proper communications system. So, if something went wrong at that airport or somebody was hopping over the fence interfering with aeroplanes flying backwards and forwards, unless your ranger pitches up at the right time or the pilots are there, you would not know—and, because there is no camera surveillance, I can understand why.

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, so can I.

**Senator MURRAY**—There is absolutely no need for it. But, let us say that somebody did stumble on it, there is no phone they can use?

**Mr Keefe**—There is, yes.

**Senator MURRAY**—Does it work?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes, that is what I was saying earlier.

**Senator MURRAY**—Is it a landline?

**Mr Keeffe**—It is a mobile line; it is a real phone linked to a mobile phone.

**Senator MURRAY**—But you said that the mobile coverage there had—

**Mr Keeffe**—No. If you have your own mobile, you will not pick it up unless you get to certain areas. But on the wall outside there is a phone, which is a mobile phone, which has a direct link to any number in Kalbarri. It can only ring local numbers. There is another phone going into the office which is STD linked. You used to be able to get the mobile out there, but they changed it. There is an Optus tower here for CDMA and they turned the booster to the south.

**Senator MURRAY**—Is your ranger on radio?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes, two source radios. He is on air-to-ground radio and on our bushfire service network radio, which is state wide.

**CHAIR**—Are you sure to the best of your recollection that there was no opportunity for you to discuss with the consultant his ideas, particularly for the fencing, where you could have said, ‘I think you have not taken this bit into account’?

**Mr Keeffe**—I guess, to be fair to the consultant, I could have done that. But I was new to the game of airports and this whole business. Taking some advice from other people, they said, ‘Just get your consultant in and, whatever he is going to do, submit that.’ That is the attitude I took.

**CHAIR**—It is really just that front part that we saw that you are talking about, isn’t it?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It is not beyond the wit of mankind to extend that and do what you say.

**Mr Keeffe**—No.

**CHAIR**—I would not have thought it would be at a high cost to add a section on and add a curved section over the top. If that were able to be done, would that be of some benefit?

**Mr Keeffe**—If you are going to control it and secure it from people getting in there, yes. But most lay people, to go there, would not be bothered scaling that fence.

**CHAIR**—But I am taking you back a step. If you had had the opportunity, which you may have had, to say, ‘I would prefer it to be a bit higher and have a curved section coming over the top,’ which is just a cyclone fence—

**Mr Keeffe**—We could have done it.

**CHAIR**—That is what you would have asked for?

**Mr Keefe**—Probably.

**CHAIR**—If you could still get that, that would be an advantage, wouldn't it?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes.

**Ms GRIERSON**—With your shire hat on but thinking of the future of the airport, how will you go about funding those communication and transport needs?

**Mr Keefe**—I do not think communication is that big an issue, really. Once we get this other phone up and the radio—

**Ms GRIERSON**—Finding the fault and making sure it is reliable.

**Mr Keefe**—Because it is a licensed airport, you have to do all these checks daily anyway.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Does the ranger do those checks?

**Mr Keefe**—Yes. There are certain parts of the airport where you have to do things daily, monthly, six-monthly or quarterly. He has to do all that. If he is not around, one of the other blokes will do it. The communication side is not a big issue once we get the STD phone up. There is a reason for getting the STD phone up. The police and so on have a communication link direct to Perth; they cannot get them from radio, but they would get them from radio up at that site, as it is very high.

**Mr TICEHURST**—How far is that from town?

**Mr Keefe**—Ten kilometres.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Is your developer making contributions for anything?

**Mr Keefe**—No, not at the moment—I tell a lie. The original owners of that development up there, Kel Brown and Rob Elliott, gave us a quarter of a million dollars to help build the airport. WA Airports Corporation also gave us \$100,000.

**Ms GRIERSON**—With growth there may be opportunities to do a bit more.

**Mr Keefe**—With growth, we get the landing fees up with those coming across to make a profit.

**Mr TICEHURST**—How long is your runway?

**Mr Keefe**—It is 1.6 kilometres.

**Mr TICEHURST**—What is the biggest aircraft you can land?

**Mr Keeffe**—The safest aircraft is a BA146. You can land a 747 here, provided that it is not fully loaded; but it can land here in an emergency. I am not a technical officer, but I understand that the reason is that the 747, when landing, screws around and the weight of the aircraft can damage the tarmac. Also he has to be damned good to be able to turn around on the northern strip because, if he is not, he will put his wheels out over the edge because of the width of the wheels on the wings. But in an emergency he can get here, yes. The PM's plane was going to come here. What sort of plane is that?

**Mr TICEHURST**—It is a 737.

**Mr Keeffe**—He can land here in a 737; he was actually going to land here. We were all waiting for him, but he did not turn up in the end.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Do you know of any suspicious activity around regional airports? Is there gossip or speculation about anything?

**Mr Keeffe**—No, I have not heard anything.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Everyone must be too busy working.

**Mr Keeffe**—In our situation, I am running the shire as well as an airport. It is pretty intense. When we were building the airport, it was full on for about three years. It was very intense for about 18 months. In the role of the CEO, I was battling to keep abreast of my own work let alone mucking around building an airport.

**CHAIR**—Have you always lived here, or have you been a CEO of other councils?

**Mr Keeffe**—I will have been in local government for 30 years in June. I have been here for 10 years. This is my second CEO posting. The rest of it was spent as the shire treasurer at a number of other local government locations.

**Ms GRIERSON**—For security reasons and for procedural reasons, do you think it would be better if small airports—even if they are in different shires—were under the management or control of other airports? You have an excellent relationship with Geraldton; that is working very well. They are not interfering but just supporting you, I would have thought.

**Mr Keeffe**—On the technical side, absolutely, because there is so much that goes on that you have to do that you have no idea of. I am lucky. I can just ring Bob Urquhart and say, 'What do I do, Bob?'

**Senator MURRAY**—He seems to be a very nice man. Are there refuelling capacities there?

**Mr Keeffe**—No. That is one thing that we are not allowed to have.

**CHAIR**—Is that because of environmental requirements?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. You could put it in there, but the environmental requirements are unbelievable.

**CHAIR**—That will be a bit of a barrier for you in the future.

**Mr Keeffe**—No. They will do it because now they have these self-bunded fuel tanks and stuff like that. They just have to do an actual management plan of how they would control a spill and all that. When we looked at doing it, it was going to cost a quarter of a million bucks and we bailed out and said, ‘No, we want nothing to do with it.’ If the airlines want fuel, they go and talk to fuel companies to put it in. The little charter operator has his own and he had to submit a full management plan. But, because he is so small, it is just in a bunded area; if there are any spills, it is controlled within that bunded area.

**CHAIR**—How does he refuel?

**Mr Keeffe**—It is done through BP, but I am not sure how they do it. They were doing it by 44s.

**CHAIR**—They would have had to stop on the way.

**Mr Keeffe**—You can do it by 44s out there. We have had the helicopter up here doing feral goat shooting. It is a very large helicopter that runs on avgas. The did all avgas from 44s, which is quite legal around the north-west.

**Senator MURRAY**—Considering the population in the gorges.

**Mr Keeffe**—When we built the airport, we had to do a study on the effects that the aircraft would have on visitors in the gorges.

**Mr TICEHURST**—How many passengers would you get through here in a year?

**Mr Keeffe**—At the moment, there are 30 a flight—I did not bring those figures with me. It is hard to say. Skipper started halfway through; RPT services last year were \$5,000; so that is 500.

**Mr TICEHURST**—Will this resort make a big impact?

**Mr Keeffe**—We believe it will because it is focused on overseas visitors.

**Mr TICEHURST**—So it will double?

**Mr Keeffe**—I hope so.

**Ms GRIERSON**—So this motel will be absolutely luxury.

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**Mr TICEHURST**—But even double is no big deal, is it?

**Mr Keeffe**—Not for us. If we get doubles, we will have a very comfortable little airport. It will not cost the ratepayers any money. At the moment it is costing ratepayers a fair quid.



**CHAIR**—People come here for active tourism, looking around?

**Mr Keeffe**—To chill out and relax.

**CHAIR**—Is there swimming and all that sort of stuff?

**Mr Keeffe**—There is no shortage of ocean, swimming pools and the river—although I would not swim in the river at the moment as it is a bit brown. But primarily it is for those reasons. The wildflower season is absolutely huge here. The whole park is in bloom—nice and green—and the water is flowing.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Is there an Indigenous population here?

**Mr Keeffe**—No. It is actually taboo. There is a claim over it all. One of the family members of that claim claim that they were driven off, but that is not the fact. I understand that the story is that they all got washed out when camping on the river and since then they call it a taboo town. It is the same as Dongara; that is taboo as well. But they do come here. They visit here; they just do not live here.

**Senator MURRAY**—Dongara is a suburb of Geraldton, a big crayfishing area.

**Senator MURRAY**—Yes, it is a huge retirement village. That is what this one is coming to as well. The last census in 2001 shows that over a quarter of the population were around the age of 60.

**CHAIR**—You have told us that not many planes fly in. Where do they come from predominantly? Where have they come from immediately before arriving here?

**Mr Keeffe**—I do not know, because we do not have that data.

**CHAIR**—What is your guess?

**Mr Keeffe**—I would guess that they come more from the south and metro area.

**CHAIR**—Would they come straight from Perth or would they stop at Geraldton?

**Mr Keeffe**—I do not think they would stop at Geraldton.

**CHAIR**—Do you think they would come straight here?

**Mr Keeffe**—It would depend on the fuel load, I guess. I do not know much about it really.

**CHAIR**—But you could not fly here from any other capital city; you must come through Perth?

**Mr Keeffe**—I do not know.

**Mr TICEHURST**—You would not have the fuel to get out.

**Mr Keeffe**—I do not know whether you would have the fuel.

**CHAIR**—You can see where I am leading on this. In a security sense, to get here you have to have gone through—

**Mr Keeffe**—You would have to go through some land to get here. You might have to land in a farmer's paddock, because I think you would run out of fuel before you got here. If it were me, I would be hopping to an airport where there is fuel, like Carnarvon or and Shark Bay, those areas. That is probably why our numbers are pretty low; it is probably because we do not have fuel. Technically any pilot is supposed to ring you up and get approval to land and they say, 'Have you got fuel?' and I say, 'No, sorry.' They say, 'Where can I refuel?' and I say, 'You have to make your own arrangements.' They say, 'Bugger it, we might as well give it a miss,' and go straight to Geraldton. It is probably a downfall for us, but our aim for the airport was to provide a service to the Kalbarri area, particularly in emergencies. Also, at that time the state government were very keen to see it built.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Mr Chair, I suggest that when we are out there we use our camera mobile phones to photograph all that and send it through to DOTARS when we get back to Canberra just so that they know that that fence has definitely been built.

**CHAIR**—Would you be happy to talk to the consultant again and say, 'Look, on reflection'—

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—The government is spending \$35 million.

**Ms GRIERSON**—They should at least know that it might not be—

**CHAIR**—Yes. For better or worse, without any criticism of you, that probably was not quite apt of the consultant at the time. But it does not mean that what is there is it and that you have to necessarily wait until the next time, particularly if there is a clause that says, 'If there is any extra that needs to be spent—

**Mr Keeffe**—We probably could. But from my point of view now it would be a waste of time.

**CHAIR**—You say that it would be a waste of the time, but you said before that, if it had been built that way at the start, it would have been better.

**Mr Keeffe**—Just the fencing, yes. But I still reckon that to muck around with the fence now would be a waste of money. I just do not think it is necessary at all.

**Mr TICEHURST**—All it is doing is keeping the roos out.

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. If all of a sudden we find a spate of incidents happening on the airside, we will do something pretty quickly, but I just do not think it is necessary. There are better and bigger things in my shire to spend money on than the airport fence. That would be the case for

many of my residents and ratepayers who do not live anywhere near Kalbarri, particularly the farmers who bring in most of the rates and all I hear is, 'We're wasting bloody money on that Kalbarri Airport'.

**Mr TICEHURST**—What does it cost you per year?

**Mr Keeffe**—We have been going pretty well. Last financial year we had a \$16,000 loss. We have budgeted \$30,000 for 10 years.

**CHAIR**—That is \$30,000 a year for 10 years—loss?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. That is our business plan.

**Ms GRIERSON**—Geraldton want you to turn that around.

**Mr Keeffe**—They certainly do, but Geraldton have to be a little careful because they do not have to do a lot to have their airport profitable. Mind you, \$5,600 of that \$16,000 was spent on consultancy fees. One of our biggest costs every year is having to spend close to \$10,000 on a CER audit—consultative environmental review audit—for eight years.

**CHAIR**—That is because they are a national park. Is that state based?

**Mr Keeffe**—Yes. We also have to get rid of the old airport.

**CHAIR**—On behalf of the committee, thank you for taking the time to attend this hearing and for taking us on a tour of the airport and for your hospitality today. Please pass on our thanks to the council president for his attendance also.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Grierson**, seconded **Mr Ticehurst**):

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 1.45 pm**