

The Proposed Works

Scope and Options

- 2.1 The proposal submitted by DoTARS involves the following elements:
- improving, strengthening and extending the runway from the present 2.1km to approximately 2.65km to enable use by wide-bodied and heavy lift aircraft;
 - extending the apron area and taxiways; and
 - relocating the lowering sections of existing roads to suit the runway extensions.¹
- 2.2 DoTARS considered relocating the airport but rejected this on environmental and cost grounds. Subsequently, three other options were proposed at the present site. These were:
- 550m extension to the south;
 - 550m extension to the north; or
 - a combination of extensions to the north and the south.²

1 DoTARS has provided comprehensive details of the scope, purpose and cost of the project in its Submission to the Committee, refer Appendix B, Submission No. 1. See in particular paragraphs 6-22, 36-43 and 55-70.

2 Appendix B, Submission No. 1, paragraph 30.

- 2.3 Following a detailed site survey and discussions with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), Environment Australia and Parks Australia, the preferred option was to extend the runway 460m north and 90m south.³

The Cost

- 2.4 The proposed project is estimated at \$51.3 million. This amount was made available from a provision of approximately \$100 million under the Strategic Investment Coordination process to assist the APSC project to proceed on Christmas Island.⁴

Revenue Generation

- 2.5 DoTARS advised that the airport upgrade would allow Boeing 747- 400 to land with a payload of 80 tonnes and to take-off with a payload of 72 tonnes and an Antonov 124 -100 to land with a payload of 70 tonnes and to take-off with a payload of 63 tonnes.
- 2.6 The airport generates revenue from landing charges based on tonnage of the aircraft. The proposed extensions would allow larger-bodied aircraft to land, thereby increasing the revenue collected.⁵ At the public hearing, DoTARS advised that the number of aircraft using the airport is forecast to rise from 423 to approximately 1,350 in 2006 and subsequent years.⁶

Purpose and Suitability

Need and Public Value

- 2.7 DoTARS noted that the purpose of the proposed upgrades is to:
- provide improved services for the Christmas Island community;
 - provide a facility for large bodied aircraft;

3 Appendix B, paragraph 32.

4 Appendix B, paragraphs 23-28.

5 Appendix B, paragraph 53.

6 Appendix C, Hansard Transcript, PW 3.

- support the proposed operation of a commercial space launch facility by the Asia Pacific Space Centre (APSC);⁷
- support the Government's objectives for Christmas Island;
- allow greater flexibility to air services for the Indian Ocean Territories by increased strength and length of runway; and
- create short and long term job opportunities for the local community and develop the local skills base.⁸

2.8 In a reply to a question from the Committee about the need for the upgraded airport if the APSC does not proceed, the Administrator of Christmas Island replied that irrespective of the APSC, there is a requirement for the upgrade on safety grounds.⁹

Suitability

2.9 DoTARS advised that the existing runway is 2,100 metres with a taxiway and apron designed for an aircraft that takes 140 passengers such as the Boeing 737-300. The Boeing 767 size aircraft is capable of using the runway but exceeds the pavement design strength of the runway and its use could shorten the runway's life.¹⁰ The current runway length and strength is inadequate for the freighter aircraft 747-400 and Antonov required for the space launch facility. Without the upgrades, therefore, the APSC operations cannot proceed.

Safety Measures

2.10 The DoTARS submission advised that provision of emergency services at the airport, including fire tenders and associated vehicle storage facilities were included in their original referral to the Committee in August 2001. Emergency services facilities are not included in the current airport upgrade proposal after advice from CASA that these services would not be required because of low airport utilisation.¹¹

2.11 At the public hearing, the Administrator of Christmas Island, Mr William Taylor, speaking from a community point of view, noted

7 Appendix B, Submission No. 1, paragraph 9.

8 Appendix B, Submission No. 1, paragraph 28.

9 Appendix C, Hansard Transcript, PW 17.

10 Appendix B, submission No. 1, paragraphs 16 and 17.

11 Appendix B, Submission No. 1, paragraph 8 and 80.

community concern in relation to the exclusion of firefighting services at the airport. Mr Taylor stressed that, if there were to be further services from the north “most of the airlines, if not all, would not be happy to come to Christmas Island International Airport without the provision of fire services.”¹²

- 2.12 Mr E Turner, Manager, Christmas Island Aviation Services also expressed serious concerns about CASA’s decision. At the public hearing, Mr Turner tabled an exchange of letters to and from CASA and the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government relating to the serious safety concerns of airlines coming to Christmas Island airport.
- 2.13 Mr Turner’s advice to CASA and the Minister indicated that airlines such as Merpati and Silk Air, a Singaporean company, had expressed a wish to discontinue their weekly flight unless the fire tender were replaced.¹³
- 2.14 In a reply to Mr Turner, the Minister observed that the low level of activity at the airport did not justify the considerable capital required for Airservices Australia to establish and maintain Rescue and Fire-fighting Services to appropriate International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. This estimate also included the recruitment of appropriately trained personnel. The Minister noted that the Island Administration, as the airport operator, could make local arrangements for a basic level of fire fighting services if required by foreign airlines¹⁴
- 2.15 Mr Turner explained to the Committee at the public hearing that CASA’s exemption of Christmas Island airport from rescue and fire fighting services was given the year after the closure of the Christmas Island Resort.
- 2.16 Mr Turner did not believe, however, that acquiring a \$1.5 million fire truck facility was justified. Instead, he suggested good second-hand equipment could be transferred from the mainland at a cost of between \$200 000 to \$400 000. The cost of the service, including the payment of training and wages, could be made to the local fire brigade who could be trained to operate the facility. Administrative costs could be paid from levies on the airlines rather than coming from Commonwealth funds.
- 2.17 According to Mr Turner, if such a facility were provided, international carriers would fly to the island on a regular basis.¹⁵

12 Appendix C, Hansard Transcript, PW 5.

13 Exhibit Nos. 2 and 3

14 Exhibit No. 4

15 Appendix C, official Hansard transcript, PW 40

- 2.18 DoTARS confirmed that in the submission provided to the Committee in August 2001,¹⁶ fire fighting services were included because the airport upgrade was associated with the APSC facility at South Point. However, CASA assessed that the nature of the work at the airport did not warrant the current exemption to be lifted.¹⁷
- 2.19 The Christmas Island airport manger, Mr Don Bridges summed up by suggesting to the Committee that “There would not be an airport manager around who does not want a fire service”¹⁸
- 2.20 The Committee does not understand nor accept CASA’s exemption of the fire fighting services, particularly as the upgrade to the airport is associated with the ASPC facility.

Recommendation 1

In order to encourage international aircraft to use Christmas Island, the Committee recommends, as a matter of urgency, that the Department of Transport and Regional Services approach the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to remove its exemption on the provision of emergency services at the airport.

16 Refer Chapter 1, paragraph 1.3

17 Appendix C, Hansard Transcript, PW 8.

18 Appendix C, Hansard Transcript, PW 56