



Submission No: ...49...

Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

7 July 2005

Mr Russell Chafer
Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Chafer

I refer to the letter of 21 June from the Chair of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Mr Bob Baldwin MP, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs inviting agencies within the Foreign Affairs portfolio to provide a written submission to the Committee's inquiry into aviation security in Australia.

In his letter, Mr Baldwin indicated that the Committee was particularly interested in receiving information from the department on security management at airports in the region that have direct flights to Australia. I note that is a matter on which the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) is best placed to respond and I understand that such issues will be covered in DOTARS' submission to the Committee. Over the past year DOTARS has established an overseas presence with the posting of transport security officials to Indonesia and the Philippines. These officials have a regional role. DOTARS' overseas presence will be strengthened with the posting of three additional officials to the region over the coming months. This should provide Australia with a more complete understanding of the regional transport security environment, including potential threats to Australian interests.

In addition, the Australian Customs Service (ACS) has officers based in Indonesia and Thailand who work closely with host customs administrations to enhance airport border security. The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) has placed 17 Airport Liaison Officers (ALOs) at 12 international airports with direct flights to Australia. ALOs work directly with airlines and immigration and airport staff to prevent travel to Australia of inadmissible passengers and to facilitate the travel of genuine passengers. They also provide training to immigration authorities, airline and airport security staff on Australia's immigration requirements.

In the Pacific, two Australian transport security officials have been in Port Moresby since August 2004, one of whom is focused on improving airport security standards at Port Moresby Airport. Australian transport security liaison officers travelling out to the Pacific

have conducted capacity audits in several countries and have identified areas of security weakness. Based on these audits, feedback on how to improve aviation security at key aviation facilities has been provided to country representatives at technical workshops. A Pacific regional transport security workshop is planned for Fiji in mid July 2005 to draw this work together and plan a way forward.

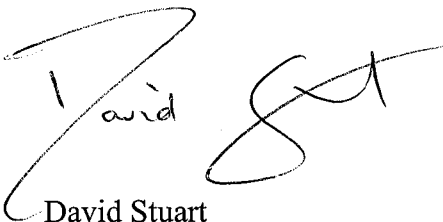
Two areas related to aviation security in Australia that are of particular interest to this department are dignitary protection and VIP facilitation, and Australia's international reputation in upholding high standards of aviation security.

In relation to dignitary protection and VIP facilitation, Australia is a major transit hub for people travelling between the Pacific Islands and Asia, Africa and Europe. Heads of State and Government and government ministers frequently transit Australian airports. In addition, Australia also provides medical, education and tourist services for dignitaries from neighbouring countries. Australia has obligations under international and domestic law to protect foreign dignitaries from harassment or impairment of dignity.

At the same time, the department recognises that these legal obligations do not displace Australia's responsibility to respond to the international security environment to ensure the safety and security of the travelling public, including dignitaries. Clearly, the Government needs to meet both sets of obligations. The department's concern is that screening processes for dignitaries be managed in a careful and sensitive manner, including through the provision of appropriate facilities, where required, to undertake such screening procedures.

At a broader level, the department has a concern to ensure that Australia's international reputation as a country that sets and maintains high standards of security at our international gateways is maintained. This is especially the case now in the light of major international events Australia will be hosting over the next couple of years (e.g. the Commonwealth Games and APEC in 2007), and the potential negative impact on our international reputation from publicity surrounding cases such as the Corby case.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Stuart', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

David Stuart
First Assistant Secretary
International Security Division