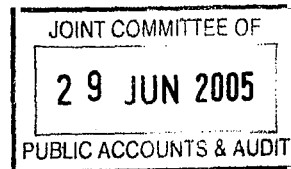


Submission No:20.....

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20/06/2005



Russell Chafer
Secretary for the Committee of Aviation Security in Australia
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Chafer

Thank you for bringing to my notice the review of developments in aviation security in Australia since your Committee Report 400/ "Review of Aviation Security" in Australia tabled in parliament in June 2004.

Since that time I have continued to correspond with the Honourable John Anderson Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. His office informed me that in December 2003 the Government set aside \$93 million dollars to install hardened cockpit doors on passenger aircraft of 8 or more seats, a new freight screen system, anti-theft measures for general aviation aircraft and background checking of pilots. In addition the use of Aviation Security Identification Cards (ASIC) by aviation industry staff was extended to encompass regional airports such as Mildura, and it was announced that ASIC applicants must undergo a police records check and security assessment by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation. The statement was made that access to security sensitive areas in the airports was totally controlled and only those personnel displaying a valid ASIC are able to enter.

The Honourable John Anderson's office also informed me that in August 2004 a further \$48 million dollar package was set aside focusing on regional aviation security. The measures included training of airport staff in using hand wand screening technology at 146 regional airports; education and training of regional airport and airline staff in responding to and managing regional airport security incidents; trialling of closed circuit television at regional airports; and additional funding for hardening of cockpit doors of charter aircraft of 30 or more seats. In addition regional rapid deployment teams consisting of 8 Australian Federal Police Protective Service Members were established. These teams are supposedly able to at short notice attend regional airports in response to information received or changes to the level of threat. It is my understanding that they will travel by commercial flights. The first regional rapid deployment team was deployed in Mildura in January 2005 according to the report from Mr Anderson's office.

These measures are commendable and mean that the government recognises that there is a need for greater security at regional airports such as Mildura. It is mystifying given this recognition and the measures already put in place that the glaring hole in security arrangements of not screening passengers and their hand luggage is allowed to continue. It is like building a fowl pen to keep out the fox but leaving the door opening without a way of it being closed.

The reason given for the avoidance of passenger and hand luggage screening by Mr Anderson in the popular press, as quoted in the Sunraysia Daily Saturday 7th August 2004, seems to be purely financial, based on the cost to the airport owners, the airlines and the passengers. It stated that the degree of risk does not warrant putting the door on the fowl yard. The amount of risk can never be ascertained with certainty from the terrorism point of view and cannot be ascertained at all with respect to mental illness and the incident on board the aircraft from Melbourne to Launceston, where wooden stakes were used, would have been disastrous if that particular passenger had boarded at a regional airport such as Mildura where he would have had nothing to stop him taking on board the aircraft and using, a firearm.

The financial argument against passenger and hand luggage screening does not hold water at any level. The cost per ticket at Mildura has been estimated as a high of \$9 per ticket and a low of \$7 per ticket. It costs about the same to travel by air from Mildura to Melbourne as it does from Melbourne to New Zealand and aircraft from this area have high passenger loading levels and it is quite often not possible to get onto an aircraft. The airlines are making considerable profits from regional airports such as Mildura and with help from the Commonwealth Government with setting up costs, could easily run passenger and hand luggage screening. In addition I have enquired of the Honourable John Anderson's office as to whether it is possible for the owner of an airport to be sued if an aircraft is high-jacked after it has taken off from an airport where there is no passenger or hand luggage screening in today's need for heightened security climate. Their reply states that it is difficult to generalize about airport owners liability in relation to security incidences as any incident would be handled by the courts and liability would be judged taking into account specific details of the matter. I think it is highly likely that should a passenger aircraft taking off from Mildura be used as a guided bomb at the MCG on Grand Final day or at the Commonwealth games, or was flown into a large building, the Rural City of Mildura, as the owner of the airport would be sued by multiple people and the rate-payers of the area would struggle for years with that financial burden and the development of this vibrant area would falter. I believe that the conclusion must be drawn that the financial arguments against having passenger and hand luggage screening at regional airports such as Mildura is a superficial one and does not bear scrutiny.

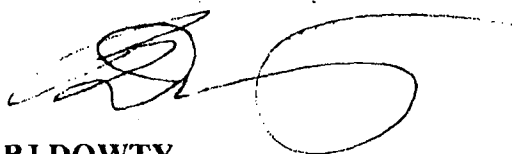
The current requirements are that airports operating jet aircraft with 30 or more passengers must have passenger and hand luggage screening. Mildura currently operates Dash 8 aircraft, which are turbo prop aircraft, with at times 50 passengers and at times 36 passengers; and SAAB aircraft which have 36 passengers. The danger of having a 50 passenger turbo prop aircraft hijacked and used as a guided bomb must be every bit as real as the danger of a 40 passenger jet and this division is artificial.

The division is probably holding back development of some regional airports such as Mildura. Our airport is designed to take 737 jet aircraft and the demand for airline seats is such that the service could be in place but for increased security requirements and in particular passenger screening and hand luggage screening that go with the use of jet aircraft. It is likely we would have 737 aircraft operating out of Mildura if Dash 8 and SAAB aircraft passengers were requested to be screened along with their luggage.

There is no doubt that regional airports will have passenger and hand luggage screening in the future. There will be a rapid political scramble to make that happen should a mentally ill passenger or a terrorist hijack an aircraft with all the tragic consequences that may ensue from that. It would be much better to put the door on the fowl yard before the fox arrives rather than wait until disaster has struck and react to that disaster.

I will enclose a photocopy of the Sunraysia daily Saturday August 7th 2004 article setting out the quoted reasons for lack of passenger and hand luggage screening at regional airports and I will also enclose a copy of my letter of the 11/12/2003 asking about the possibility of airport owners being sued and the reply from Mr Anderson's office dated 14th December 2004.

Yours sincerely



BJ DOWTY

Saved as aviation security Russell Chafer