

Chapter 6

The future of aviation security

6.1 It is forecast that by 2030, passenger traffic through Australian airports will double and be concentrated through relatively few airports. Inbound arrivals, predominately from a variety of low cost carriers, will total 36.6 million people.¹

6.2 It is important that Australia consider the future of aviation security to best ensure the continued safety of airline travellers and airport staff and crews. A number of steps have already been taken to ensure that Australia's aviation security environment proactively addresses risks and changing threat levels.

6.3 The future security environment should acknowledge the work of previous aviation security reviews and the key concerns of stakeholders, as raised in this inquiry. As noted earlier in this report, the committee supports regulatory changes that address serious threats to aviation safety, but encourages changes that are evidence based and proportionate to the risks presented.

Reforms to enhance security

6.4 In its deliberations, the committee considered what measures should be taken to enhance Australia's aviation security environment and to better protect the travelling public. In this, the committee acknowledges that not all known vulnerabilities can be mitigated, as this would result in an unviable sector. This means that a risk-based approach is most appropriate in addressing security risks. To this end:

the Department is conducting comprehensive risk assessments in collaboration with other agencies and industry to determine where current aviation settings can be better tailored to high risks and resources can be redirected from areas of very low or negligible risk. This move to a risk-based, proportionate security approach will ensure that in the future, as the aviation sector grows and pressures on resources increase, effort is applied to areas of highest risk, rather than being misdirected to very low risk areas.²

6.5 The committee supports this approach and notes that it addresses the concerns of various submitters, who did not support a 'one size fits all' approach to aviation security regulation and action. It is also hoped that such an approach will reduce costs for regional and rural airport operators.

1 Transport Security Outlook to 2025, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, August 2014, https://infrastructure.gov.au/security/files/Transport_Security_Outlook_to_2025.pdf, (accessed 1 February 2017), p. 4.

2 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 3*, pp. 4, 11.

6.6 The government announced, in February 2017, the creation of a new General Aviation Advisory Group. This group reports directly to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport on concerns within the general aviation sector, to encourage 'safe skies, industry growth, and less red tape'.³ The group is also tasked with highlighting the concerns of regional and rural airports, and the increased regulatory burden on small operators.⁴ The committee recognises this initiative as an opportunity to inform discussion and awareness of security vulnerabilities for smaller airports.

Security costs and implications for regional and rural airports

6.7 The committee appreciates the significant costs associated with strong security measures required in airports across the country. However, it was concerned to hear evidence regarding the disproportionate impact on regional and rural airports of implementing expensive security systems, which may not reflect the threat levels at these airports.

6.8 As part of its submission, the AAA surveyed its members about security-related investment and received 20 responses. These responses showed the following:

- between 2010 and 2015, these 20 airports across Australia invested approximately \$28,740,000 into the purchase of screening equipment, such as x-ray machines, metal detectors and an explosive trace detection machine;
- building alterations to accommodate passenger and checked baggage screening cost 17 airports approximately \$19,775,000; and
- over the next ten years it was expected that 17 airports would need to invest in new security equipment at a combined investment cost of \$52,000,000.⁵

6.9 Despite the relatively small sample of airports in this survey, AAA argued that it showed significant investment was being made into airport security.⁶

6.10 For this reason, the costs of enhanced security to all airline and airport operators must be taken into consideration when developing security regulations. For

3 The Hon Darren Chester MP, 'General Aviation Advisory Group takes flight', *Media Release DC030/2017*, 17 February 2017.

4 Paul Cleary, 'New advisory group to steer aviation sector: Chester', *The Australian*, 17 February 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/new-advisory-group-to-steer-aviation-sector-chester/news-story/d8e9403c347af433034dd88a0bfbb6b2> (accessed 20 February 2017).

5 Australian Airports Association, *Submission 17*, pp. 8, 9.

6 Australian Airports Association, *Submission 17*, p. 9.

example, in 2013-14 alone, Qantas spent '\$260 million on its security operations and development initiatives'.⁷

6.11 The department acknowledged in its submission the diverse nature of the aviation sector, and the cost sensitive nature of aviation security on regional and remote airports, which in many instances have high passenger costs but low demand. The department stated that the viability of regional airports could be threatened by 'increases in operating costs and revenue reductions'.⁸

6.12 AIPA raised concerns about the costs and considerable difficulties involved in securing an airport perimeter and creating a 'land buffer' to prevent entry into an airfield space. AIPA argued that 'the total distance of the total airport land area boundary is staggering when translated into the dollar cost of the high security barriers'.⁹

6.13 As part of the Post Implementation Review (PIR) of VIC enhancements in 2014, the OTS considered the security risks to smaller, remote and regional airports. These are generally classified as 'category 6' airports, where smaller aircraft operate and there are no screening requirements. The PIR found that:

The current aviation risk context statement's risk weightings confirm that category 6 and general aviation airports do not make inherently attractive terrorist targets. The more likely risk events for these types of airports would be the unlawful interference with smaller aircraft by acutely disaffected persons.

The absence of screening at category 6 airports also represents their lower risk profile, and while personnel are required to hold ASICs, a passenger may take unscreened baggage onto any...aircraft.¹⁰

6.14 However, the PIR also noted that:

Despite the desire to comply, without adequate funding to support implementation in smaller or more remote locations (including for staffing or equipment) or the ability for more widespread auditing activities, it may be difficult for communities with little understanding of the complexities of identity security to carry out required duties.¹¹

6.15 AIPA acknowledged statements by OTS about taking a risk-based approach to aviation security, which it was hopeful would see funding resources allocated to those

7 Qantas Airways Limited, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

8 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 3*, pp. 1, 2.

9 Australian and International Pilots Association, *Submission 6*, pp. 3-4.

10 Visitor Identification Card Enhancements Post Implementation Review, Maritime, Identity and Surface Security, Office of Transport Security, 2014, p. 7.

11 Visitor Identification Card Enhancements Post Implementation Review, Maritime, Identity and Surface Security, Office of Transport Security, 2014, p. 8.

areas of most vulnerability.¹² The committee supports the allocation of funding for improved security to those areas that most require it.

6.16 In 2015, the government announced a new training program to assist regional airports to better manage their security processes:

Slated to begin in 2016, the new regional aviation security awareness training package would be available to the 150-odd security controlled airports in small, lower risk categories as well as the 48 airports that have screened air services such as Bundaberg, Devonport, Geraldton and Tamworth...The package would assist airports to understand the current risk environment, assist them [sic] to plan responses to future threats and improve general security awareness.¹³

6.17 In announcing this program, the government also advised it was considering the removal of passenger screening at some major capital city airports, for passengers arriving from regional airports where they had already been processed through security checks.¹⁴

6.18 The committee supports the security training program, noting the benefits of security training specified to regional and rural areas in line with assessed levels of risk. However, it appeared to the committee that the program had not commenced. Given the benefits of a targeted and risk-based approach to aviation security, the committee encourages the government to implement the program as announced, as soon as possible.

Recommendation 9

6.19 The committee recommends that the Australian Government implement the regional aviation security awareness training package, in accordance with its 2015 commitment.

Funding allocation

6.20 Melbourne Airport argued for adequate financial resourcing for various border agencies, especially in light of increased international passenger movements. Melbourne Airport argued that:

The Commonwealth Government collects significantly more revenue from the Passenger Movement Charge than it spends on airport security and

12 Australian and International Pilots Association, *Submission 6*, p. 6.

13 'Government to develop new security training program for regional airports', *Australian Aviation*, October 26 2015, <http://australianaviation.com.au/2015/10/government-to-develop-new-security-training-program-for-regional-airports/> (accessed 1 March 2017).

14 'Government to develop new security training program for regional airports', *Australian Aviation*, October 26 2015.

border agency functions so there is scope for more funding resources to be provided for border agency functions at airports.¹⁵

6.21 Media reports indicate that the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) has also called for more appropriate allocation of funding derived from the Passenger Movement Charge, to help improve border facilitation services. The TTF argues improvements can be made with more border security staff and better border management technology, to reduce large queues for outgoing and incoming passengers.¹⁶

Passenger terminals

6.22 Dr John Coyne, the head of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Border Security Program, argued that arrival and departure halls are now the most vulnerable areas for targeting of attacks on airports. Dr Coyne noted that passenger terminals have 'few if any security measures before check-in or in the crowds of family, friends...waiting in arrival halls'.¹⁷

6.23 Dr Coyne called for an independent review of Australia's airport security and consideration of 'revolutionary change' to the security of arrival and departure halls:

The aim of security responses need to focus on reducing the concentrations of people prior to security checks. Similarly, in arrival halls the aim must be reducing the concentrations of uncleared people and goods.¹⁸

6.24 ASIO argued that the open and accessible nature of some airport spaces make them attractive areas for low-capability attacks, with these areas attracting concentrations of large crowds. ASIO noted that the death of an outlaw motorcycle gang member outside Sydney Airport in 2009, while not related to terrorism, showed that security incidents can occur in relatively open airport areas.¹⁹

6.25 The department advised the committee that it was working with airport operators to invest in security measures at the front of terminals, which were easily accessible to the public. These measures are not in the Act or the Regulations, but have been introduced proactively to address risks and make the front terminal areas

15 Australia Pacific Airports (Melbourne) Pty Ltd, *Submission 8*, p. 5.

16 Lisa Allen, 'Tourism chief Margy Osmond says airport queues hurt image', *The Australian*, 28 November 2016 at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/tourism-chief-margy-osmond-says-airport-queues-hurt-image/news-story/b596a6e1f81d367e8ea4406c50c0e3ce> (accessed 30 November 2016).

17 Dr John Coyne, 'Weakest link in airport security exposed again', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/airport-security-will-need-to-be-tightened-after-ataturk-attack-20160629-gpubzo.html> (accessed 13 December 2016).

18 Dr John Coyne, 'Weakest link in airport security exposed again', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 2016.

19 Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

more secure. Measures include better infrastructure design, strengthened bollards at entrances and better vehicle traffic management.²⁰

6.26 The committee notes that Dr Coyne called for 'another independent review of Australia's airport security'.²¹ However, the evidence received during this inquiry indicated that numerous reviews have been completed since Wheeler in 2005, and repeated amendments subsequently made to the aviation security framework. The committee would encourage further examination of passenger terminals, in light of the issues raised, but does not see a need for an all-encompassing review of the whole sector.

6.27 The committee agrees that the front terminal areas or airports present a security risk, given the absence of security screening and clear passenger movement channels. The committee commends the department on its proactive work to address the security risks of passenger terminals, and supports the continuation of this initiative with the full engagement of key stakeholders.

Current security measures

6.28 In an effort to prevent security breaches, the Australian Border Force (ABF) maintains a permanent presence at Australia's major international airports.²² ABF engages in a number of security-related activities, including but not limited to:

- aircraft searches, baggage monitoring, intelligence collection and perimeter and airside patrols;
- analysis of flights, passengers and crew prior to their arrival in Australia;
- addressing risks related to the movement of persons or goods of national security concern; and
- assisting the AFP and other agencies in 'conducting airside inspection for criminality relating to people leaving secure areas of airports'.²³

6.29 A Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU) now operates at all major international Australian airports. These teams proactively intervene in suspicious circumstances or intercept suspicious persons of national security interest in areas controlled by Customs. Since implementation in August 2014, a number of people have been intercepted by the unit.²⁴

20 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 3*, p. 9.

21 Dr John Coyne, 'Weakest link in airport security exposed again', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 2016.

22 Australian Border Force was known as Australian Customs and Border Protection Service at time of submission.

23 Immigration and Border Protection Portfolio, *Submission 19*, p. 2.

24 Immigration and Border Protection Portfolio, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

6.30 Additionally, the Last Port of Call (LPOC) inspection program examines in-bound passenger movements from international airports flying direct to Australia, to assess security risks and take any proactive remedial action that may be appropriate.²⁵

6.31 The AFP has stated that the law enforcement focus has also shifted to develop new ways of exchanging intelligence on airport security. While the focus remains on counter terrorism and organised crime, the AFP is specifically targeting trusted insiders and corruption under its organised crime strategy.²⁶

6.32 Following a meeting of the AFP in December 2016, it was agreed to increase intelligence gathering at international and domestic airports, due to concerns that organised crime groups were identifying or manipulating airport employees considered 'soft targets' in an effort to 'infiltrate airport workers in a bid to shift large amounts of illegally obtained cash, drugs and weapons'.²⁷

6.33 Measures to address security risks will include real time monitoring of social media, and a trial of body cameras that could be linked in future to facial recognition software. The AFP is also reportedly examining the New York Police Department's Shield intelligence model, which accesses 'global industry, law enforcement, intelligence agency intelligence and publicly-available information to guide patrol modelling'.²⁸

6.34 A matter for future consideration is that of the AFP's powers and improving its ability to address security risks at airports. For example, in certain circumstances AFP officers do not have authority to request or demand proof of identification documents from a person who uses false identity information to travel on a flight, as they are departing an airport. The AFP can only detect the offence after the event (or if another offence is committed). The AFP argued that 'an effective preventative measure would be to enable a form of identification to be produced with a boarding pass, prior to any person boarding a flight'.²⁹

25 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 3*, p. 8.

26 Renee Viellaris, 'Organised crime, terrorism seek to infiltrate Australian airports', *The Courier-Mail*, 12 December 2016, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/travel/news/organised-crime-terrorism-seek-to-infiltrate-australian-airports/news-story/b1bada45a9048508bc14dc47273e7752> (accessed 13 December 2016).

27 Renee Viellaris, 'Organised crime, terrorism seek to infiltrate Australian airports', *The Courier-Mail*, 12 December 2016.

28 Renee Viellaris, 'Organised crime, terrorism seek to infiltrate Australian airports', *The Courier-Mail*, 12 December 2016.

29 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 16*, pp. 6-7.

Biometrics

6.35 Since 2015, new SmartGates have been installed in Australia's international airports, in an effort to provide improved security. SmartGates use biometric technology to confirm the identity of passengers and reduce manual intervention at arrival and departure gates. The SmartGates were implemented as part of counter-terrorism measures.³⁰

6.36 In its submission to the committee, the IBPP highlighted that it was working towards a 'seamless, low-touch and high-tech' departures process at major international airports:

The eGate technology...operates with facial matching algorithms, producing a higher quality match decision than a manual face to passport check and reducing the opportunity for fraudulent documentation and/or imposters to successfully process.³¹

6.37 The government has since announced further updates to international passenger processing, with the introduction of the Seamless Traveller project. The new technology abolishes passenger cards, removes the need for manned desks and the requirement for passengers to show passports. The program would see the removal of SmartGates and progress to a 'contactless' system:

...passengers will be processed by biometric recognition of the face, iris and/or fingerprints, matched to existing data. By 2020 the government wants a system in place to process 90 per cent of travellers automatically, with no human involvement.³²

6.38 Despite announcing these advancements, the government is yet to secure the tender to provide the required technology, and it is unclear how the technology will differ from SmartGates.³³ Some media commentary has raised concerns about the risks of collecting and storing such large volumes of biometric data obtained by this process, and the particular risks to personal information should data security breaches occur.³⁴

30 The Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, 'New security measures at international airports', *Media Release*, 23 April 2015.

31 Immigration and Border Protection Portfolio, *Submission 19*, p. 5.

32 "World first: Government moves to radically overhaul Australia's international airports", Michael Koziol, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/world-first-government-moves-to-radically-overhaul-australias-international-airports-20170116-gtss5w.html> (accessed 23 January 2017).

33 "World first: Government moves to radically overhaul Australia's international airports", Michael Koziol, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 2017.

34 'Stealing your eyeballs: Dutton's stealthy plan to track you', Bernard Keane and Josh Taylor, *Crikey*, 23 January 2017, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2017/01/23/duttons-brutopia-recognising-the-face-of-surveillance/> (accessed 23 January 2017).

6.39 Some submitters to the inquiry urged caution in taking this route, despite the benefits it may provide to travellers. In its submission to the committee, the Law Council of Australia highlighted its concerns with any further security reforms in the areas of biometric identification and the collection and storage of personal identifiers:

The collection and use of biometric material in airport and aviation security has the potential to impact on a large number of individuals, including those who pose no risk to Australia's national security. The collection and use of such material also has the potential to have significant and potentially serious privacy implications, including implications for the way sensitive personal information is stored, used and destroyed.³⁵

6.40 The National LGBTI Health Alliance also raised concerns over biometric identification, noting that 'the use of gender in identification tests is likely to have a disproportionate adverse impact on LGBTI populations'. It made the point that any use of personal identifiers in biometrics should not discriminate against or disproportionately target members of the LGBTI community.³⁶

6.41 The committee notes that any developments in the use of biometrics must be complemented by adequate safeguards around the storage of that biometric information. If this information should ever be accessed by those willing to do harm, and 'repurposed' for their needs, then it may prove to have its own security risks.

Committee view

6.42 The committee acknowledges the work of regulatory, security forces and law enforcement agencies in keeping Australia free from a major security-related incident at its airports. The regulatory conditions have been subject to constant review and amendment, with changes that have no doubt strengthened Australia's aviation security framework.

6.43 However, the committee urges caution against an excess of constant reviews and reforms. The regulations should provide the best security outcomes, but should not be amended so much as to become confusing, costly and not fit for purpose. Reviews should be in response to changing risk and threat levels.

6.44 Over the course of this inquiry the committee was presented with serious allegations and evidence of security risks and breaches at Australian airports. Of particular concern was evidence, spanning a number of years, around weaknesses in passenger screening processes, and abuse of the ASIC and VIC schemes.

6.45 The committee commends the steps that have been taken to address the issues in these areas, but there remains significant scope for breaches of security. Stringent background checking and improvements to the current ASIC self-reporting regime

35 Law Council of Australia, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

36 National LGBTI Health Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 5.

would go some way to addressing these concerns, as would increased oversight and centralisation of ASIC issuing processes.

6.46 While the media has an important role to play in bringing aviation security concerns to the attention of the general public, submissions made clear to the committee that the complexity of security regulation was not always reflected in such reports. Comprehensive and timely industry reporting to regulatory bodies of security incidents and emerging security risks would allow for the development of intelligence-based and risk appropriate reforms to the security framework.

6.47 The aviation sector and relevant government bodies continue to implement new and improved ways of combating aviation security threats. While the cost of such improvements and amendments should always be considered, particularly for smaller operators, the committee supports endeavours that help better protect the travelling public and airport employees.

Senator Glenn Sterle

Chair