

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ATSB Chief Commissioner Greg Hood opening remarks

Budget Estimates 23 May 2017

The first five months of 2017 have been challenging for the ATSB.

Since 1 January this year we have released 57 investigation reports into accidents and incidents across the aviation, marine and rail transport modes.

We have commenced 42 new safety investigations since 1 January, some of which have been serious accidents and high-profile incidents.

In Perth, Western Australia during the city's Australia Day celebrations, a Grumman American Aviation Corp G-73 Mallard aircraft crashed into the Swan River. Tragically, the pilot and passenger died in the accident which was witnessed by tens of thousands of spectators.

On 21 February this year, we launched an investigation into the accident involving a Super King Air aircraft at Essendon Airport in Victoria. The aircraft commenced a take-off roll just before 9am and shortly after becoming airborne, struck the roof of the adjacent DFO complex. There was a significant post-impact fire and the pilot and four passengers were fatally injured.

On 17 March, the right propeller of a Rex Saab 340B aircraft detached in-flight with 16 passengers and three crew on-board. Fortunately, the aircraft landed safely in Sydney. With invaluable assistance from NSW Police Air Wing, the ATSB recovered the 100kg propeller assembly from bushland near Revesby.

The ATSB's examination identified a fracture in the propeller shaft which led to the separation of the propeller. We have published a preliminary report and the investigation has already resulted in safety action from GE the engine manufacturer and Regional Express.

Our investigations into these accidents and serious incidents are ongoing. While I am unable to provide additional comment, I assure the Committee that our investigators are working hard to determine the causal factors.

Importantly, we have published the second interim report into the In-flight pitch disconnect involving an ATR 72 aircraft, near Sydney Airport on 20 February 2014. Our investigation has identified transient elevator deflections during a pitch disconnect event could lead to aerodynamic loads which could exceed the strength of the aircraft structure.

As a result of our investigation to date, we have issued safety recommendations to the European and Australian regulators, EASA and CASA as well as the manufacturer of the aircraft, ATR. These parties now have 90 days to respond to our recommendations.

We have also released our research report, *A safety analysis of remotely piloted aircraft systems 2012 to 2016* which provides in-depth analysis of the risks associated with RPAS in Australia.

It is now four months since the search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 was suspended.

The ATSB's search team, and the experts from many organisations both in Australia and overseas supporting the search, worked tirelessly and with absolute commitment, dedication and a single-minded focus to find the aircraft.

They did this not just to provide the answers for the families of those on board but to improve transport safety. It was difficult and challenging work and I would like to place on record my appreciation to all of those individuals from around the world who have been involved in the search for MH370. Our disappointment that we were unable to find the aircraft is profound.

Many challenges face transport safety into the future. There is significant growth in aviation, rail and marine transport and we are seeing some of the effects of emerging technology such as automation and the use of remotely piloted aircraft, or drones.

The ATSB will continue to work with aviation, rail and marine operators, industry associations and regulators to highlight safety concerns identified from our occurrence data and investigation findings.

As I approach the end of my first year as Chief Commissioner I'm humbled by the achievements of the ATSB team in safety investigations and communication, trend analysis and prediction, and improved efficiencies. While I acknowledge there's still work to be done, I am proud to lead a team committed to doing all we can to maintain and enhance transport safety in Australia.

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