

Rural Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2011

Infrastructure and Transport

Question no.: 134

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Aircraft Noise Ombudsman

Proof Hansard Page/s: 59 (26/05/2011)

Senator Back asked:

Senator BACK: Can you advise us how many complaints the office has received in that time and how many have actually been processed, dealt with and so on? Do you have a feel yet for that?

Mr Russell: I do not have that number with me, but I can say that he reports publicly every quarter. They are on a website and are publicly available. I can find the information in some detail and provide that to you if you so wish.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that 94 complaints were received by the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman from commencing operations in September 2010 to 26 May 2011. Of these, 81 complaints have been closed with 13 remaining open.

The Ombudsman has released three reports which are available at www.ano.gov.au.

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Budget Estimates May 2011

Infrastructure and Transport

Question no.: 135

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Tyabb Airfield

Proof Hansard Page/s: 60-61 (26/05/2011)

Senator Back asked:

Senator BACK: One would hope that that process would also yield positive results, so that is most interesting. You may recall in the references hearings on airfields, Tyabb, south-east of Melbourne, was an example of what almost appeared to be uncontrolled; it did not seem to come under either local, state or federal government jurisdiction in terms of noise. Can you just tell me, or remind me, what the circumstance was there and if there has been any change in regard to the capacity or the process of complaints by members of the public? It was particularly in relation, as I recall, to the fact that more noisy and older aircraft could actually use those airfields.

Mr Russell: Yes. I think we talked about this at the time, that we have no representation at the airfield in question. I would have to double check to see whether in fact we were collecting complaints from that area. I am happy to take it on notice and get back to you, but it certainly to my mind there has not been a lot of development that I am aware of since we had this discussion. Let me take it on notice.

Answer:

The airspace surrounding Tyabb Airfield is classified as Class G, meaning operating aircraft use Common Traffic Advisory Frequency procedures and not an air traffic control service provided by Airservices Australia.

The Tyabb Airfield is privately owned and operated.

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Question no.: 136

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Wind Shear Incident at Darwin

Proof Hansard Page/s: 63 (26/05/2011)

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Mr Russell, you may be constrained in what you can say, but is Airservices Australia cooperating in an inquiry that the ATSB is undertaking in relation to an incident involving a Jetstar aircraft out of Darwin towards the end of last year? It was a windshear incident and there was no suggestion that the crew did anything but follow all the procedures accordingly.

Mr Russell: We cooperate with the ATSB on a whole range of their inquiries. I do not specifically know this particular issue, but it would not surprise me that we have been consulted over this issue by the ATSB.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you take that on notice? Obviously if it is an ongoing investigation, I do not expect you to give details until that investigation is complete, but just the fact as to whether you have been contacted by the ATSB.

Mr Russell: Certainly, if it involved air traffic control where we operate I can do that. I might say, if it was in Darwin the reason that I may not know about it is that it is operated by the Royal Australian Air Force—that operation in Darwin; the tower in Darwin.

Answer:

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau is investigating a wind shear incident which occurred at Darwin Airport on 30 October 2010.

Airservices Australia does not provide the air traffic control service at Darwin and has therefore not been contacted for information about this incident by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

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Question no.: 137

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Airservices Australia Executives

Proof Hansard Page/s: 64 (26/05/2011)

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: As to information I have had from people within your organisation—and, again, I want to put this fairly and carefully to you—how many senior executives have left the organisation in the last five years? I have been told there have been some 12 or 13 senior executives who have left.

Mr Russell: It is in that order, yes.

Senator XENOPHON: Again, I am happy to take this on notice, but can you advise whether there were monetary settlements in terms of those people leaving the organisation?

Mr Russell: Yes, there were.

Senator XENOPHON: Could I get details in relation to that? Did those settlements include any confidentiality agreements?

Mr Russell: It is usual in these circumstances for a deed to be produced. I can provide you with some further information on that issue.

Senator XENOPHON: I understand that you have also lost another senior executive just this week; is that right?

Mr Russell: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: This person was specifically hired to lead a much publicised project to harmonise air traffic control with your RAAF colleagues; is that right?

Mr Russell: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: That would be subject to a confidentiality agreement as well?

Mr Russell: I would imagine so, yes.

Senator XENOPHON: But you will be able to give us an idea of the sort of money that was spent?

Mr Russell: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised for the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2011, nine senior executives left Airservices and each was paid their entitlement under the terms and conditions of their employment contract.

All Airservices employees, including senior executives, are subject to confidentiality provisions which apply post employment.

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Question no.: 138

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Cognos Project

Proof Hansard Page/s: 64-65 (26/05/2011)

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: There is an electronic information tool called Cognos or Dashboard; are you familiar with that?

Mr Russell: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: That is a project under development by IBM?

Mr Russell: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: This project apparently has an expenditure approved of how much?

Mr Russell: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator XENOPHON: Was it in the order of \$2 million to \$3 million?

Mr Russell: I cannot give you a precise number, but it was designed to bring together a lot of information in terms of how Airservices operates and put it into a process where we can get a better understanding as to how the organisation is working.

Senator XENOPHON: Are you confident that the amount that was budgeted for, which I understand was \$2 million to \$3 million, will be kept within budget, or is it going to blow out of budget?

Mr Russell: I would have to check on it, but I have heard nothing to the contrary that that suggestion is the case.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you give some detail, again because of time constraints, on notice as to how that will assist Airservices Australia in terms of how it will work?

Mr Russell: Yes.

Answer:

Cognos is a data management and reporting tool that allows data to be dynamically compiled and analysed from disparate systems. Airservices has been using the software for some time and is in the process of upgrading the organisation's data warehouse and exchange capability and at the same time developing an executive dashboard. The software is currently used to compile a range of information on flight activity, safety incidents and predictive analysis for services.

The IBM deliverables are an executive dashboard and the replacement of legacy reporting data sources with a robust reporting centric enterprise data warehouse (Phase 1).

The budget for Phase 1 is \$3.4m (which includes internal labour costs) of which IBM will receive \$2.5m; \$0.35m relates to the development of an executive dashboard and \$2.15m relates to establishing data warehouse architecture. The spend to date is \$1.5m. The IBM contract is a fixed price/deliverable contract and there is nothing to indicate the budget will not be met.

Three further phases are projected to deliver national flow management data, workforce analytics and revenue and billing data. These phases have yet to be committed to.

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Question no.: 139

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Airservices Australia Just Culture

Proof Hansard Page/s: 65-66 (26/05/2011)

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: I have a couple more questions. I would be grateful if I could get more information on notice about that project. The information I have had from within air traffic control is that they do not feel comfortable of a just culture in reporting safety concerns. How does the just culture operate within Airservices Australia, especially in air traffic control? The information that I have had, in quite explicit terms, is that they are worried about retribution if they speak out on issues. That is one person's perception. How do you deal with that perception so that people do not feel reluctant or reticent to come forward with concerns?

Mr Russell: In a safety critical organisation like this it is fundamental that you have a workable just culture well and truly entrenched. Unlike some other of our counterparts in other parts of the world I am very confident that that system works very well. There is never a question of retribution, of people putting up their hand and saying, 'There is an issue that has occurred.' Every day in our organisation we review the incidents that have been recorded. I sit in on those meetings. We review incidents that have been recorded in Australian airspace, by our own staff largely, and sometimes we follow things up. I think it is by that process that you learn how to improve how you operate and improve the safety of the air traffic system.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you provide details of the protocols and the information given to staff about just culture? That would be very useful. Finally, in relation to your earlier answer about a shortage of air traffic controllers, unless that is addressed do you see that causing flight delays in the short to medium future?

Mr Russell: We are working to ensure that that is not the case. As to the profile that we have looked at in terms of people who are likely to retire from our organisation over the next five years, initially we thought it was going to be fairly significant—over 30 per cent—across all of the disciplines in our organisation, because we have an aged workforce and there had not been a lot done about training new people. We have put a lot of work into that, firstly, and we will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Equally we have found that—maybe it is a result of the GFC—people are just a little bit more reluctant to perhaps retire as early as they want to.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised the fundamentals of its Just Culture Policy were outlined in a memo to all staff on 12 January 2007 and have been reinforced by managers on a regular basis since that date.

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In essence the policy states that enhanced safety and performance outcomes will be materially improved through the uninhibited reporting of all incidents and occurrences that compromise safety or performance within our operating environment. Staff are required to:

- Report all instances where safety or performance levels have been compromised;
- Support those who have either reported or have been directly involved in an occurrence;
- Investigate with objectivity and confidentiality;
- Learn from each occurrence by indentifying contributory factors and implementing strategies to strengthen our systems and prevent recurrence; and
- Disseminate learning to provide a more informed and safer organisation.

More recently the Airservices' Staff Code of Conduct and Fair Treatment Review System have been reviewed and workshops undertaken by the Executive and other senior managers. All staff are about to take part in workshops about the organisation's corporate values.

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Question no.: 140

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Air Traffic Controller Fatigue

Proof Hansard Page/s: Written

Senator Heffernan asked:

In the USA an air traffic controller (ATC) fell asleep at 2am 12/04/2011. It was found that the ATC was working alone during the night shift when he fell asleep for 16 minutes, in which time a medical flight was attempting to land. On 14/04/2011 the USA ruled that ATCs will no longer work alone during a night shift.

- 1) Do Australian ATCs work alone during night shifts? Please provide details of incidences and airports.
- 2) Has Australia experienced the same issues of ATCs falling asleep whilst on night shift?
- 3) What are the current monitoring systems in place to ensure that ATCs are awake at all times?

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that:

- 1) Single controller operations overnight occur at Adelaide, Perth and Cairns, however the low density of aircraft traffic in these ports at these times is such that controllers have adequate opportunity for appropriate breaks.
- 2) An incident was reported in February 2007 at the Perth Terminal Control Unit.
- 3) A range of preventative work practices and measures are in place to ensure controllers remain alert when working at night. These include routine communication calls between controllers, enhanced mobility around the work area and completing administration tasks in addition to air traffic management. The Air Traffic Control Collective Agreement defines break and rest periods for controllers on shift. This includes the requirement for controllers to have a minimum 10-hour rostered break between shifts. Airservices also has a robust fatigue management system in place for controllers and fatigue awareness training is conducted.