

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates May 2009
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No.: AA 01

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia
Topic: Air Traffic Controllers' Sick leave
Hansard Page: 44 (28/05/09)

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I was going to ask you: since the agreement came in, have you noticed a change in the culture of the air traffic controllers? But as it has only started today, I guess you will not have noticed any change at all. Perhaps since the agreement was made, although it came into place today, have you noticed any change?

Mr Russell—From the point of agreement in-principle, there is quite a process involved in having the agreement written up and then reviewed by, as part of the Government bargaining framework, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Australian Workplace Authority. We have seen since that in-principle agreement was reached some months ago that things have settled with the air traffic group.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—In a statistical way, would the number of one-day sickies have decreased in the last two months?

Mr Russell—I would need to provide you with more detail on that and I am happy to do so, but we have seen a general decline in the number of sick days taken year on year. I am happy to provide you with further detail if you would like it.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If I could leave that on notice, in a relevant period—I mean, when we last discussed this in estimates. Perhaps that might be an appropriate time, or shortly after. Anyhow, I am just interested in the statistics in some relevant period that I will leave to you I understand one of the issues in negotiations was the skills shortages in your part of the industry. I am just wondering what plans you have in place to address the issue of skills shortages into the future.

Answer:

Air Traffic Controllers Sick Leave— Single Day Absences

	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09
Single days sick leave taken by operational air traffic controllers	310	237	248	277	291	349

Airservices Australia has advised that whilst the table above shows a rising trend since the new Air Traffic Control collective agreement was agreed in-principle on 27 February 2009, sick leave absences naturally vary from month-to-month during the course of a year including seasonal variation during the winter months which we are experiencing at the moment. Seasonal trends, however, are no worse than in previous years.

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Question No.: AA 02

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Air Traffic Controllers Working Overseas

Hansard Page: 45 (28/05/09)

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You mentioned that. Is it possible to get on notice statistics of how many AT controllers have left Australia in the past year?

Mr Russell—We can provide with you that information now.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And how many of them have returned or been replaced by ATCs from overseas? Would that information be—

Mr Russell—I can provide some of that now and perhaps, if it is not adequate, we can take the rest on notice.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Yes, sure. That will be good.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009, the number of air traffic controllers that left Airservices Australia to work overseas is estimated to be 11. This number is not precise given that employees are not compelled to advise the basis for leaving Airservices. For the same period, Airservices re-employed six controllers who returned to Australia as well as 30 controllers from overseas.

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Question No. AA 03

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS-B) Ground Station Locations

Hansard Page: 48 (28/05/09)

Senator Sterle asked:

CHAIR—Earlier this year, Mr Russell, Airservices Australia had a meet and greet upstairs here. I remember having the opportunity, as would a lot of other Senators, of looking at some new surveillance technology for Australian airspace. You have got me thinking about this after what Senator Macdonald was talking about. Can you update us on where we are up to?

Mr Russell—Much of the continent of Australia has no traditional radar coverage. We provide radar coverage in areas largely around our capital city airports and largely down the east coast of Australia around to Adelaide.

Senator Conroy—How long has that been the situation?

Mr Russell—A long time. Australia has been amongst the first countries to announce a program of introducing what is called ADS-B, automatic—

CHAIR—Data surveillance?

Mr Russell—Sorry, it is one of those acronyms. In relation to aircraft suitably equipped with the right transponders, broadcast to satellites which are then broadcast back to our ground stations, we can pinpoint the location of these aircraft in upper airspace. We have been working on this program for some years. We currently have 16 of these ground stations in place in Australia. Our aim is to roll out a full 28 by the end of the year and then perhaps more of them. This will be the first time in upper airspace, above flight level 250, that we will have radar-like coverage of by far the majority of international and domestic aircraft flying through our airspace. It will allow us to improve efficiency by closing up the long separations between aeroplanes that are currently the case and improve of course the safety of operations. It is a program, as I say, that we have been working on. It is not without some challenges. It has meant we have had to go back and reconfigure the whole digital backbone of communications throughout the country in some very remote areas. By the end of the year, I hope to have that program in place.

CHAIR—Do you have a list or could you tell us where these 16 stations are?

Mr Russell—Yes, I can. I can provide that to you and perhaps a map, again, might be helpful.

CHAIR—That will have the 28 by the end of the year? It will have their locations as well?

Mr Russell—It will show you what we have active at the moment and what we propose to have connected by the end of this year.

CHAIR—Do you have a list or could you tell us where these 16 stations are?

Mr Russell—Yes, I can. I can provide that to you and perhaps a map, again, might be helpful.

CHAIR—That will have the 28 by the end of the year. It will have their locations as well?

Answer:

Airservices Australia has provided the location of ADS-B ground stations in Attachments A and B.

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Question No.: AA 04

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Riverina TAFE

Hansard Pages: 49-50 (28/05/09)

Senator Sterle asked:

CHAIR—Welcome back, everyone. We will continue. Mr Russell, I have just about finished my questions, but we were talking about the wonderful initiatives that Airservices Australia has commenced in Wagga at the Riverina TAFE and you had told me that there are 18 students who have gone in in the first batch and that each semester that will increase and there will be 36 going through, I think.

Mr Russell—There will be the 18 each semester. So, in total, by the end of the year we will have 36 in training.

CHAIR—That is a wonderful initiative. And of those, you told me, there were six from the Riverina.

Mr Russell—That is right.

CHAIR—So, I take it that the other 12 have come from other parts of New South Wales or other parts of Australia?

Mr Russell—Other parts of Australia, with a bent towards young people from regional Australia.

CHAIR—Sorry, there is a fellow doing the mobile phone walk out there. He has got something glued on his ear and is shouting. I missed all of that, I am sorry.

Mr Russell—Six of the 18 have come from the Riverina, broadly the Riverina area, and the remainder have come from other parts of Australia, mainly with some background in regional parts of Australia. We set out to target that area in particular.

CHAIR—That is a wonderful initiative, because this Committee has seen similar things happening in other parts of transport in Queensland—Brisbane comes to mind. Would you be able to table more information on the—

Mr Russell—Yes, we will be pleased to.

CHAIR—Riverina TAFE, the courses you do and where the students have come from. Congratulations. Well done.

Answer:

Airservices Australia / Riverina Institute of TAFE Technical Officer Training Program

Airservices Australia has advised that:

- Airservices and NSW TAFE Riverina Institute (Wagga Wagga Campus) have jointly developed the Diploma of Electronics and Communications Engineering (Course Code UEE50507).

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- The two-year Diploma includes four semesters of classroom based training delivered jointly by NSW TAFE and Airservices, and four field work deployments per year. Field work contributes to evidence-based assessments of a number of academic units.
- The first year of the Diploma focuses on core Engineering skills. The second year features specialised industry content and is designed to significantly reduce the time required for trainees to gain the certifications required under Civil Aviation Safety Regulation 171.
- Airservices have invested approximately \$800,000 in equipment located at the Wagga Wagga Campus to support the second year specialised industry content.
- 18 students will be employed by Airservices each year.
- On completion of the diploma, the cadets will be placed at Airservices' bases across Australia where they will become part of specialist support teams responsible for the maintenance of Australia's national airways system, such as radars and navigation aids.

2009 Intake

- 130 applicants.
- 52 interviews (held in Wagga Wagga, Melbourne, Brisbane, and by telephone).
- 18 employees started February 2009.
- Regional distribution of applications reflected the emphasis in advertising which was directed towards regional NSW, regional Victoria, Brisbane and northern Queensland.
- The distribution of successful cadets / trainees was consistent with the distribution of applicants overall as shown in the table below:

State (Region)	Successful Cadets/Trainees
Queensland (Brisbane / Sunshine Coast)	3
Queensland (Townsville)	1
ACT (Canberra / Queanbeyan)	3
NSW (Armidale)	1
NSW (Riverina)	6
NSW (West Wyalong)	1
Victoria (Bendigo)	1
Victoria (Melbourne)	2

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Question No.: AA 05

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia
Topic: Air Traffic Control Collective Agreement
Hansard Page: 57 (28/05/09)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—So, the two new what you call trigger points and checks and balances were in the old agreement.

Ms Fleming—No, sir. The eight-day cap on single-day sick leave was not in there. The formal letter at 10 days was not in there, and the ability to revert to a capped system if people took more than 15 days was not in there. So, they are the additional things.

Senator McGAURAN—But that is just the trigger points, what you act upon, such as talking or counselling, if you like, and the referral to a medical officer, were also in the old agreement.

Ms Fleming—Certainly, they were parts of it.

Senator McGAURAN—All you have done is put days on it now.

Mr Russell—Look, Senator, a much tighter arrangement has been put in place with respect to this agreement. It is a major step forward as far as the organisation is concerned, and it is one where I have a great degree of confidence that we are going to be able to manage this issue, which we set out to do at this beginning of this negotiation—manage it very effectively. Now, it is up to management to do the job, and that is something we do not shirk from.

Senator McGAURAN—What role did the Minister have in this agreement, the finalising of the agreement or the ticking off of the agreement?

Senator Conroy—A constructive one, unlike the lackadaisical, incompetent role performed by the previous ministers over 11½ years, Senator McGauran, who never achieved a significant movement like this.

Senator McGAURAN—What do you say—

Senator Conroy—A constructive one.

Senator McGAURAN—What does—

Senator Conroy—We will take it on notice and we will let you know.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that Airservices Australia and Civil Air determined the content and terms of the collective agreement in the process of negotiation. Once the agreement terms were settled, the Government's Bargaining Framework required the agreement to be reviewed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and then submitted to the Minister for his approval before going to a vote of the employees to be covered.

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Question No. AA 06

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia
Topic: Air Traffic Control Sick Leave
Hansard Page: 58 (28/05/09)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—How will you prove to me or show to me or convince me that this is not just paper talk, it is real muscle?

Mr Russell—Senator, let me answer that by saying this: I was personally involved throughout every step of this negotiation. I can assure you that it was a difficult and robust discussion, but I think we ended up with a fair deal and I believe it is the basis for us being able to take Airservices forward. I think we have made some very significant ground here and, for me, the job is to ensure now that I bring the organisation together. I do a lot of work on engaging the staff, particularly in the air traffic group, to get them to understand where this organisation is headed. I can say that our Board have asked for regular reports on the productivity improvements that are embodied in this agreement. I make the point to you that I think it is a fair agreement.

Senator HEFFERNAN—The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Mr Russell—It will.

Senator McGAURAN—The proof will be in the pudding, to which I remind you that Senator Macdonald has asked you for the number of sick leave and absentees, I think, from January through until now. Is that right?

Mr Russell—Yes, I think so. I made some notes.

Senator McGAURAN—This is from the in-principle agreement, at the time of the in-principle agreement.

Mr Russell—We will certainly provide that.

Senator McGAURAN—Probably included in that answer, can I have the last 12 months up to date, up to now—going back 12 months—of sick leave of all the capital city airports in each State?

Answer:

SICK LEAVE DAYS AT CAPITAL CITY AIRPORTS

	June 2008 to May 2009
Sydney	
Single day	616
Between 2 & 10 days	470
Greater than 10 days	487
	1573
Melbourne	
Single day	1217
Between 2 & 10 days	859
Greater than 10 days	1040
	3116

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Brisbane	
Single day	939
Between 2 & 10 days	1266
Greater than 10 days	368
	2573
Adelaide	
Single day	129
Between 2 & 10 days	133
Greater than 10 days	81
	343
Perth	
Single day	231
Between 2 & 10 days	163
Greater than 10 days	156
	550
Hobart	
Single day	27
Between 2 & 10 days	45
Greater than 10 days	0
	72

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Question No.: AA 07

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia
Topic: Air Traffic Control Absenteeism
Hansard Page: 59 (28/05/09)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—I still have some more questions on the agreement. Can I have, for the last 12 months, the number of days of absenteeism in each capital city airport?

Mr Russell—We will take that on notice, Senator. Yes, I would be happy to.

Ms Fleming—Could we clarify what you are wanting as absenteeism, as compared to sick leave.

Senator McGAURAN—Yes, distinct, separate.

Mr Russell—Annual, special leave, as well as people on sick leave.

Senator McGAURAN—No, people who just do not turn up.

Mr Russell—People take annual leave as well. That would be included under a question asking—

Senator McGAURAN—They are entitled to take annual leave.

Mr Russell—But if you ask me for some statistics on absenteeism, that would be included. People are not at work for quite legitimate reasons; they are on leave.

Senator McGAURAN—Absolutely.

Mr Russell—Do you want that included?

Senator McGAURAN—No, definitely not.

Mr Russell—Okay. So it is about sick leave, in particular?

Senator McGAURAN—How do you define ‘absenteeism’? You are not absent if you are on holidays.

Mr Russell—You are, technically.

Senator Conroy—You have said that you would take that on notice.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Are there people who just do not turn up?

CHAIR—Senator McGauran, do you have any other questions?

Senator O’BRIEN—It could only mean people who are absent for no reason.

Senator McGAURAN—Yes, people who do not turn up to work without reason. Thank you.

Mr Russell—Absent without reason. If I can agree on that, I will be pleased to provide that for you.

Senator McGAURAN—Is that possible? Maybe it is not.

Mr Russell—It is.

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that staff are absent from the workplace for a range of reasons including annual leave, long service leave, special leave and sick leave. Those sick leave days accumulated in the last 12 months by capital city airports was noted in the response to AA 06. Airservices has no record of staff being absent for “no reason” during the last 12 months.

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Question No.: AA 08

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Tinderry Incident

Hansard Page: 62 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—In Canberra here, for instance, where there is the radar on the hill here, that can be read from Melbourne, can't it, out of hours?

Mr Russell—The Mount Majura radar, yes, it is. It is plugged into the system in Melbourne.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So, this bloke that nearly flew into the mountain out here, if he had come down lower, would have been controlled by the bloke in Melbourne. Instead of that, he was flying on his own and he bloody near put that 737 into the hill.

Mr Russell—I am happy to take that issue on notice, because I think there is more to it than perhaps either you or I, at this present point, have in front of us. So, I am happy to take it on notice.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I do not want to interfere with any inquiries, but was there any inquiry?

Mr Russell—As I understand it, there was an inquiry.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What did it conclude?

Mr Russell—I do not have the details with me, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Answer:

The incident was investigated by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) and the final report is available on the ATSB website.

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Question No. AA 09

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Canberra Airspace

Hansard Page: 75 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—At 11 o'clock at night when half the airspace is pretty well empty, the air traffic blokes in Melbourne can see what is going on here in Canberra. Why can't they have responsibility for it?

Mr Cromarty—To start with, they do not man the tower at those times of day.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I understand that, but they can actually monitor the approach so that that mob there does not fly into a hill.

Mr Cromarty—I do not know why. You would have to ask Airservices that one.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I will ask the Department to give consideration to why this is so. The new CEO, who is obviously very experienced, might give consideration to that.

Mr McCormick—I will take that on notice and I will pass it to Airservices and the Department.

Answer:

Airservices Australia provides air traffic services in Australia in accordance with requirements specified by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). An air traffic control service is provided by the Airservices Terminal Control Unit and the Canberra tower between the hours of 6.00am and 11.00pm local time. In Canberra, the airspace classification outside these hours is Class G. This method of operation is compliant with CASA requirements and consistent with other similar tower operations across the country.

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Question No. AA 10

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

I understand Airservices Australia has been running an air-traffic situational awareness trial called Unicom. I understand this was an initiative of Air Services Australia and has been conducted at Dubbo, Wagga Wagga in late 2007 and then expanded to include Port Macquarie, Hervey Bay and Olympic Dam. I further understand that it is an attempt to provide an alternative arrangement for regional airports catering for higher capacity jets now using aerodromes in regional Australia without the expensive infrastructure associated with licensed air traffic controllers and control towers. Is this a correct summary?

Answer:

Information about the Unicom Trial is available on the Airservices Australia website.

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Question No.: AA 11

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Can you provide more information about the trial?

Answer:

Refer to AA 10.

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Question No.: AA 12

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

What was its cost? How many people did it employ?

Answer:

Airservices Australia has advised that it cost \$650,000 and employed 19 casual employees.

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Question No.: AA 13

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

I further understand that the trial concluded on 31 March 2009. Is that correct?

Answer:

Yes.

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Question No.: AA 14

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Has Airservices Australia completed its report analysing the trial?

Answer:

Yes.

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Question No.: AA 15

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Has the report been submitted to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) for its policy consideration?

Answer:

Yes.

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Question No.: AA 16

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

What are the conclusions of the report?

Answer:

The Government is considering the report.

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Question No.: AA 17

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Was Airservices Australia happy with the results of the Unicom trial?

Answer:

The Government is considering the report.

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Question No.: AA 18

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Have you been advised by CASA of its response to the report?

Answer:

The Government is considering the report.

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Question No.: AA 19

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Will the report be made publicly-available?

Answer:

The Government is considering the report.

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Question No.: AA 20

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: Unicom Trial

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Nash asked:

Will Airservices Australia be supporting the adoption of Unicom as a permanent service to be included as part of the suite of third party air traffic services and provided to industry?

Answer:

The Government is considering the report.