

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2012
Infrastructure and Transport

Question no.: 145

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Financial Procedures

Proof Hansard Page/s: 70 (16/10/12)

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Has Airservices Australia introduced new controls on corporate credit cards since the departure of Mr Russell?

Mr Clark: We have certainly introduced new procedures and controls around the chief executive, and we have tightened up some of the board procedures in relation to board expenditure as well.

Senator XENOPHON: That means that your new financial reporting requirements have been introduced in terms of credit card expenses and personal expenses? Is that right?

Mr Clark: New sign-off processes have been introduced, yes.

Senator XENOPHON: Okay. If you could take on notice how they differ from the previous arrangements. For instance, is there a ban on the CEO of Airservices Australia using business class travel within Australia? Is that a new control?

Answer:

In August 2012 the following processes were introduced around credit card expenditure and corporate travel:

1. The Chief Executive Officer's credit card expenditure must be authorised by the Chair every month (previously signed off by the Chief Financial Officer).
2. The class of domestic travel is to be limited to economy when travelling between Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney and business class for other routes or flights of more than 3 hours in duration (new requirement).
3. To the extent practicable, all international travel by the Chief Executive Officer is to be approved by the Chair prior to travel being undertaken and reported regularly to the Board (previously the Board was informed of travel prior to departure).
4. Any spouse accompanied travel by the CEO, domestic or international, must be approved by the Chair. A limit of one international trip per year is to apply, with all spousal travel to be reported to the Board with costs outlined (new requirement).

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Question no.: 146

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Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Air Traffic Control 'Inhibited Display'

Proof Hansard Page/s: Written

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Earlier this month, there were reports about a Virgin Australia 737-800 being 'lost' by ATC along the Sydney-Brisbane route.

1. Can ASA please describe what happened in relation to this incident?
2. Can ASA elaborate on how an aircraft's details can become 'inhibited' on the system and what this means in real terms?
3. There has also been commentary that ASA attempted to restrict the reporting of this incident to the ATSB. What is the ASA's response to this? Are these allegations being investigated?
4. The ASA also responded that Australia's aviation system has 'multiple layers of safety mechanisms' in place, and that these include automated safety alerts in ATC systems and in aircraft.
 - (a) Would the 'inhibition' of this flight prevent such warnings being triggered in the ATC system?
 - (b) Does ASA consider that aircraft should have to rely solely on their onboard safety warnings?
 - (c) What about aircraft that do not have such systems?
5. Can ASA provide information on how this incident was treated from a training and/or disciplinary angle?
6. There have been reports that the controller in question remained at his or her console after the incident.
 - (a) Is this usual practice?
 - (b) Is it consistent with ASA safety procedures?
 - (c) Were there other controllers available to take over the console if required?
7. Is ASA aware of the screenshots published on the Crikey blog 'Plane Talking' that allegedly showed 'attempts made by management to pass the... error... as a 'display error'. What is ASA's response to this?
8. I note that Andrew Clark responded to this blog under the title 'Airservices media'. This response stated that the aircraft was never 'lost to Airservices air traffic controllers' and that it 'continued to be displayed on all air traffic control displays managing the airspace and was not in the vicinity of any other aircraft'.
 - (a) Is this consistent with ASA's position?
 - (b) Mr Clark made this statement in his role as Acting CEO. Did he consult with the board or any other executives or managers before making this response?
 - (c) Mr Clark was presumably briefed on this incident before he responded to the blog. Who briefed him and when?

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(d) I note that, according to the screen grabs posted on the blog, ‘appropriate assessment of known traffic for potential conflicts with VOZ913 did not occur’. Is this consistent with Mr Clark’s statement that the aircraft ‘was not in the vicinity of any other aircraft’?

Answer:

- 1&2 On 28 September 2012 a Virgin aircraft’s details were inadvertently ‘inhibited’ in the air traffic control system for about 30 minutes. An ‘inhibited’ state changes the colour and some details of the flight on the controller’s display to a depiction used for flights that are not under positive control. The flight does not disappear from the system and continues to be displayed on all air traffic control displays managing the area.
3. Airservices did not attempt to restrict the reporting of this incident to the ATSB.
4. The automated Short Term Conflict Alert that would warn the controller of any potential conflict between an inhibited flight and an active flight remained available. There was no point at which the Virgin flight's separation was compromised with any other flights.
5. Airservices Safety Management System is not a punitive system in order to encourage open reporting within a just culture environment. An internal review of the incident is still underway.
6. In accordance with Airservices Safety Management System, each incident is assessed from a risk management perspective by the manager on duty. In this instance, it was considered appropriate for the controller to remain on duty.
7. The incident was initially (and correctly) labelled in the Electronic Safety Incident Report (ESIR) as an ‘Information Delivery/Display Error’. As per Airservices internal ESIR reporting process, the incident was reviewed and the ESIR label was then changed to ‘Loss of Separation Assurance’ to more accurately reflect what had occurred.
8. Airservices confirms the content of Mr Clark’s statement.

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Question no.: 147

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (AA) Airservices Australia

Topic: Staff Conduct

Proof Hansard Page/s: Written

Senator XENOPHON asked:

1. There have been a lot of comments in the past in relation to issues within ASA, including bullying, harassment, staff shortages and even alleged misappropriation of funds. Given the recent change in upper management, can ASA provide an outline of the strategies it is developing or has in place to begin addressing these serious systemic issues?
2. Does the board have full support for these changes?

Answer:

Airservices Australia has an established code of conduct and other relevant policies which require staff to conduct themselves appropriately in the workplace.