

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 115

Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates

Outcome: Agency

Programme: Bureau of Meteorology

Topic: Automated Weather Information Service

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Question Date: 18 November 2013

Question Type: Spoken

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Just finally on this, and I am very grateful to the chair for the time: if an AWIS has broken down or is not operating, is that something that you are told or is it primarily the responsibility of Airservices Australia to ensure that it is operating and its upkeep?

Dr Canterford: I prefer not to go into those details.

Senator XENOPHON: Why not?

Dr Canterford: Because while there is still the report of the ATSB—

Senator XENOPHON: No, sorry, Doctor; you cannot get out of it that easily. I do not think that is a fair answer, for this reason: I am not asking you about this particular incident; I am asking now, in general principles, about who is responsible for maintaining an automated weather information service. If it is not the bureau, fair enough, but I am just trying to understand who is responsible for these automated weather information services.

Dr Canterford: I can talk about the responsibilities of the bureau, but it goes beyond. I would have to check. I do not know the answer to that question.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you take that on notice—

Dr Canterford: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

The ownership and maintenance of an Aerodrome Weather Information Service (AWIS) varies from airport to airport nationally and in many cases the responsibility for the service lies with multiple parties. It is an end-to-end service with the Bureau providing the meteorological input and other parties providing the broadcast component to pilots.

At the majority of airports meteorological data is measured by a Bureau owned and maintained Automatic Weather Station (AWS). In these cases the AWS provides meteorological data to a separate Bureau owned Automated Weather Information Broadcast (AWIB) device which vocally articulates AWS weather data, which can then be broadcast by other parties.

At Mildura the AWIB enables this data to be available to a telephone service and Non Directional Beacon (NDB) navigation aid (NAVAID) to provide incoming flights with up-to-the-minute weather information at the aerodrome. The line between the AWIB and the NAVAID is owned by the Airport. The NAVAID is operated by Airservices. All Bureau operated and maintained systems were operating at the time of the recent incident being investigated by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

The Airservices NAVAID transmission is due to be decommissioned before the end of the year as a new VHF transmitter is now operating at the Airport.

The previous broadcast frequency utilised by the NAVAID transmission had been intermittent and this unavailability was published by Airservices via a Notice to Airmen prior to, and during the event.