



The Hon Michael McCormack MP

Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for Riverina

Ref: MC17-005810

31 MAY 2018

Senator Barry O'Sullivan
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Rural
and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600


Dear Senator O'Sullivan

Thank you for your letter of 6 December 2017 to the Hon Darren Chester MP, the then Minister for Infrastructure and Transport about the concerns of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the Committee) in relation to the provision of aviation weather information to flight crews. The Committee's letter was forwarded to me as I am the minister responsible for the matters raised. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I note the Committee's concerns that there "appears to be an emerging pattern of inadequate, delayed and, in some instances, denied weather reporting, which would otherwise provide aviation crews with vital information required to make critical safety decisions in-flight."

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), the independent national safety investigator, advises that while it has received reports of unforecast weather relating to windshear/turbulence, thunderstorms, and fog, there is insufficient data and evidence to support a position that there is currently an emerging safety risk and issue in this regard.

Australian Government agencies and the aviation industry, including aircraft operators and flight crews, share the responsibility for ensuring the best available aviation weather information is provided and utilised in a timely manner. This shared approach is consistent with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

Australia has established an internationally regarded aviation safety framework for the provision of weather information to the aviation industry. Regulatory responsibility rests with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) is responsible for the provision of forecasts and actual weather observations. Airservices Australia (Airservices) disseminates weather information.

CASA's regulatory framework also places obligations on various sectors of the aviation industry, regarding the reporting and dissemination of weather information. These obligations include those for pilots during flight planning, and for the relay and distribution to aircraft of meteorological-related information by air traffic control, licensed observers, and pilots who observe meteorological phenomena of operational significance, such as wind shear or volcanic ash. Flight crew are also responsible for ensuring they have up-to-date information and comply with the framework.

Operationally, Airservices works closely with BoM and the aviation industry to promote safety through the provision of weather information and, where possible, to offset the impact of disruptive weather on aircraft operations. Airservices' air traffic controllers are authorised under the Civil Aviation Regulations 1988 to make meteorological observations and reports for take-off and landing.

In addition to the range of regulatory requirements outlined above, BoM has also commenced implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Aviation Weather Services, which will establish two major aviation meteorological centres by the end of 2020 to improve national aviation weather services provided to the aviation industry.

I also sought the advice of our aviation safety agencies on other issues raised in your letter.

Mildura – 18 June 2013

I note the Committee's concerns regarding the finding in the 2016 ATSB occurrence investigation report *Landing below minima due to fog involving Boeing 737s, VH-YIR and VH-VYK, AO-2013-100* (the Mildura Report) that "the industry expectation for the provision of flight information service was not aligned with that provided by Airservices Australia".

To clarify this finding, the ATSB has advised that following on from its investigation, it provided information to CASA about the apparent lack of knowledge in the pilot community regarding which weather products were provided automatically and what needed to be requested. In response, CASA undertook national pilot seminars in 2017 to raise awareness of the process for requesting weather-related information.

Airservices has implemented improved processes that require air traffic controllers to pass special weather reports (SPECIs) to flight crews when a location broadcast facility is out of service, rather than relying on the en-route broadcast system.

Further, Airservices is implementing air traffic management system changes that will reinstate alerts to air traffic controllers where weather is deteriorating below the forecast at locations with automatic weather stations, facilitating the provision of this information to pilots. The changes are scheduled for commissioning in November 2018.

Lord Howe Island – 27 October 2017

Under the Civil Aviation Regulations 1988, CASA can authorise certain individuals to make weather observations and reports. The BoM provides an Aerodrome Forecast and an Aerodrome Weather Information Service (AWIS) for Lord Howe Island. Additionally, Airservices provides a Flight Information Service, which includes meteorological conditions.

At Lord Howe Island and other locations, Australian Universal Communications radio service rules require weather reports (other than simple factual statements about the weather) to be made by a person with an aerodrome weather observer's (AWO) certificate from the BoM before broadcasts can be relied upon by pilots.

To obtain an AWO certificate, applicants must successfully complete a recognised course of training on the preparation of aerodrome meteorological observations and reports, and must demonstrate basic competence in compiling such observations.

Mr Wilson of Lord Howe Island is able to broadcast simple factual statements about the weather. However, as he is not a holder of an AWO certificate from the BoM, pilots should not make operational decisions based on the information he provides.

CASA advises that pilots operating to Lord Howe Island can rely on AWIS information broadcast from the two authorised BoM automatic weather stations (AWS) located near either end of the runway.

These weather services are commonly used throughout Australian airports by pilots for assessing the suitability of weather conditions.

RRAT References Committee inquiry into aviation accident investigations

I note the Committee's concerns regarding the adequacy of the review of weather reporting procedures and processes in the final ATSB PelAir Report released in November 2017.

I am advised however that the ATSB Report extensively documents the weather information on the day, the reliability of weather forecasts, the information that was actually provided and information that should have been provided to the crew. In addition, the Report appendices provide supporting and background information, including discussion of weather forecast reliability at remote islands (Appendix H) and analysis of Norfolk Island weather (Appendix J).

The effect of Australian aviation weather forecasts on aircraft operations: Adelaide and Mildura Airports, Australia – July 2017

The ATSB's 2017 aviation research report *The effect of Australian aviation weather forecasts on aircraft operations: Adelaide and Mildura Airports, Australia, AR-2013-200* (the research report) is the first report in a series covering Australian airports supporting regular passenger transport operations.

The research report provides advice to aircraft operators regarding the high-risk seasons and times of day for the best weather reliability, facilitating better flight planning and support for pilots, and allowing for better informed prioritisation of investment decisions about aircraft and aerodrome navigational equipment.

I note that the research report does not recommend improvements be made to the manner in which Airservices disseminates weather reports to the aviation industry and how these matters are regulated. However, as indicated above, Airservices has advised that it has already taken steps to improve processes, including seeking to reinstate the alerting function of SPECI reports, following the findings of the ATSB in the Mildura Report.

Thank you for bringing the Legislation Committee's concerns to the Australian Government's attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Michael McCormack

