

Opening Statement – RRAT Committee

Greg Hood, Chief Commissioner, Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB)

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I first appeared before this Committee in 2007, and it is with some regret that I advise that this will be my last appearance before this Committee ahead of my retirement as Chief Commissioner of the ATSB on 30 June.

My 41-year professional career has included almost a decade of service in the Royal Australian Air Force, and then a number of operational and leadership roles with Airservices Australia and CASA. I have always endeavoured to make a positive contribution towards keeping Australia and Australians safe. Leading the ATSB for the past five years has been a humbling experience and I am grateful to the Australian government for entrusting me with this privileged position.

Every one of the ATSB's 100 or so staff comes to work to make a difference to the safety of all Australians. In my time as Chief Commissioner and CEO of the ATSB, we have concluded and published more than 500 final investigation reports, which have identified numerous safety issues which led to many safety actions that have improved the aviation, rail, and marine transport industries across Australia and internationally.

If I may I'd like to touch on our role dealing with the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in transport accidents. I have met with many next-of-kin of those who have lost their lives in the most tragic of circumstances, and I would like to assure them, and this committee, of our continuing, determined commitment to conduct transport safety investigations into those accidents of the highest quality to best minimise the chance of similar accidents occurring in the future.

To highlight just one example, in January of this year, the ATSB released the final report into the accident involving a de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver aircraft on the Hawkesbury River on New Year's Eve 2017. The accident resulted in fatal injuries to the five passengers and the pilot.

During the course of the investigation, the ATSB identified safety issues that needed to be brought to the immediate attention of the industry regarding the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning. So well in advance of the publication of the final report, we published two Safety Advisory Notices - one, to the maintainers of piston-engine aircraft to inspect exhaust systems and engine firewalls and the second to operators, owners and pilots of piston-engine aircraft to consider the fitment of active carbon monoxide detectors.

Then, with the publication of the investigation's final report this year, the ATSB formally recommended that the International Civilian Aviation Organization mandates the fitment of recording devices in smaller passenger carrying light aircraft, something the accident Beaver aircraft lacked. Had there been a recording device on board, that would have considerably aided the ATSB's investigation into this tragic accident.

Today the ATSB currently has 89 active investigations and we are continuing to progress including those into a number of significant transport safety accidents that occurred in 2020 and 2021. These include:

The C-130 Hercules large air tanker which collided with terrain at Peak View, near Cooma on 23 January 2020, with the loss of life of the three American air crew on board while conducting aerial firefighting operations.

The mid-air collision between two twin-engine training aircraft near Mangalore, Victoria on 19 February 2020, in which the instructor and trainee pilots on both aircraft were killed.

The derailment of an XPT passenger train near Wallan, Victoria just a day later on 20 February, in which the train driver and assisting qualified worker were fatally injured.

The collision with terrain of a Cessna 404 charter aircraft on approach to land at Lockhart River, Queensland on 11 March 2020, in which the pilot and four passengers on board lost their lives.

The fire on board the *MPV Everest* multirole vessel while on charter to the Australian Antarctic Division in the Southern Ocean on 5 April this year. On board was a crew of 37 and 72 expedition staff, but fortunately there were no injuries.

I would also like to acknowledge these past 18 months have been a time of great uncertainty for the transport industry in general, and aviation in particular. Many ATSB investigators and operational support staff have come from aviation, rail and marine transport backgrounds and continue to maintain strong industry links. We have great empathy for operators and their workforces who are facing uncertain roads to recovery.

I would also like to acknowledge the ATSB Commissioners, Chris Manning, Gary Prosser and Catherine Scott for their professional expertise in aviation, maritime and rail for providing comprehensive expertise in the governance of the ATSB.

Finally, I am so very proud of our staff at the ATSB who have, time and again, proven themselves resilient and adaptable during this period of uncertainty. Like all Australians, ATSB staff across the nation, have had to adapt to changing circumstances during the pandemic. At a professional level they have remained committed to their work, whether this be from the office, working from home or, with the appropriate risk assessments, deploying to transport accident sites across state borders throughout Australia.

I would like to assure you that in support of the transport industry, we continue to apply our safety knowledge and expertise to carefully monitor the return of operations of safe and reliable transport to pre-pandemic levels.

Thank you, Senators, and as always, we are very pleased to answer any questions that you may have for us.