

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the performance of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, and in particular its report on the June 2017 crash of a flight conducted on behalf of Angel Flight Australia

Response to questions taken on notice at a public hearing in Sydney, NSW, on 4 September 2019

Witness: Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Responses received 18 September 2019

1. How many Angel Flights have engaged in an operation that was cancelled?

The ATSB does not have data on how many Angel Flights were cancelled. The ATSB did not require the exact number of cancellations to make its findings. The ATSB reported that some pilots do cancel flights. Where possible Angel Flight will look to use a commercial carrier.

Knowing that some pilots do cancel flights did not affect the ATSB's finding that perceived pressure is a safety factor for some pilots and that it could be addressed through enhanced training and education.

2. Who called CASA the day after the accident and said, "what are you doing about this?"

We have checked our phone logs. We do not have a record of anyone directing a question at CASA to ask "what are you doing about this?". We note though that it would not be unusual for the ATSB to enquire of CASA what action CASA is taking in response to an accident.

3. What did the ATSB tell Angel Flight when someone from Angel Flight contacted the ATSB asking if it was an Angel Flight flight?

The ATSB received a phone call from a representative of Angel Flight on 28 June 2017. The record of the conversation is 'was the Mt Gambier aircraft carrying A. VH-YTM. TB-10 [name of individual]. 1 pilot 2 passengers.'

At that time the ATSB would have been able to confirm that we had been notified and that it was a Tobago TB-10 and that we were investigating. The person who took the call advised that they would have been unable to give names or confirm it was an Angel Flight. The person who took the call was not authorised to provide that information to any callers.

4. Did the ATSB say on television after the accident that the ATSB was investigating Angel Flight?

The ATSB did an onsite press conference the day after the accident. By this time, news reports had already identified Angel Flight and the pilot.

At the press conference, the ATSB Investigator In Charge advised the following:

“On the morning of the accident the pilot landed at Mount Gambier. The pilot was organised by the charity Angel Flight to transport two passengers from Mount Gambier to Adelaide.”

...

“The ATSB has sent four investigators to the site where we will examine the accident site, the wreckage and interview witnesses.”

...

“We will examine other factors such as

- the pilot experience
- the airworthiness of the aircraft
- weather conditions
- and the coordination of the charity flight.

However, it is also important to remember that we are not going to speculate at this point on the circumstances surrounding the accident. The role of the ATSB is to conduct no-blame investigations with the aim of improving transport safety.”

The Investigator In Charge was asked a question as to whether she knew what kind of experience, accreditation or training was required to qualify to be a pilot for the Angel Flight service. The Investigator In Charge responded:

“that will just be part of our investigation, that is something we will cover during the course of our investigation.”

This response is consistent with a number of questions the investigator in charge was asked about mayday calls, mechanical issues and weather conditions. The Investigator In Charge made it clear that the ATSB would not be speculating as to cause.