

A SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL
AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT

RE

AN INQUIRY INTO PILOT TRAINING AND AIRLINE SAFETY INCLUDING
CONSIDERATION OF THE TRANSPORT SAFETY INVESTIGATION
AMENDMENT (INCIDENT REPORTS) BILL 2010-11-01

My name is Fiona Norris and my husband Paul Norris was one of the 13 passengers killed in the Lockhart River Plane Crash on the 7th of May 2005. It remains the worst civil aviation accident in Australia in over 40 years.

My interest in this inquiry is obviously a direct consequence of the terrible tragedy that myself and the other Lockhart River victims families have endured, but also as a member of the Australian public who travels on regular public transport, I have grave concerns that it is only a matter of time before there is another similar tragedy.

Lack of pilot check and training was one of the major contributing factors in the Lockhart River Plane crash, and whilst I will not speculate about the ATSB final report into the accident, it is my opinion that the system and therefore CASA failed.

My husband Paul Norris, whilst a passenger on the day, was also a pilot and held around 1100 hours flying time. The co-pilot of the accident plane had far less hours than my husband and was gaining experience in a turbo prop, twin engine, high performance aeroplane, flying fare-paying passengers. Whilst the Captain was experienced with over 5000 hours flying time, placing an experienced Captain with a very inexperienced co-pilot, I believe can create too much of an "authority gradient", where the co-pilot may indeed be too scared to speak up and question any of the Captain's decisions. The result was that all the holes in the Swiss cheese lined up and the outcome was a disaster where 13 passengers and the flight crew lost their lives, in what was, an avoidable tragedy.

It seems that pilots are no longer gaining their experience in the conventional manner of building their hours as a Flight instructor or going out bush where real decisions have to be made and actual hands on flying is required in an environment without fare paying passengers. Instead the airlines are finding the next wave of pilots through cadet programs where men and women pay for their endorsements and are placed into a cockpit environment without the real hands on experience to fall back on.

Deregulation of the Australian airline industry, I believe has played a major role in the erosion of the safety culture and whilst the Australian public now enjoys

cheaper airfares and more Australians are now able to travel by air, I am sure that no member of the general public, wants their safety compromised by inexperienced flight crew.

Therefore I make the following recommendations -

- I strongly recommend that pilots flying on RPT hold a minimum of no less than 1500 hours as required in the United States.
- I strongly recommend that there is an independent body established where pilots are able to report any concerns regarding safety conduct within a RPT operation without fear of retribution.
- I strongly recommend that pilots are not able to transfer from a base overseas into an RPT operation in Australia with less than a minimum of 1500 hours and subsequently be paid a minimum wage.

Fiona Norris
October 2010