Review of Aviation Security in Australia

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Submission concerning compliance with Commonwealth security requirements by airport operators and airlines. (b) and (c)

Preamble:

1. Because of the impetus provided by the Sydney Olympics, Aviation Security in Australia was rapidly enhanced to meet acceptable international standards. Emphasis was placed on upgrading the technology available to perform the required tasks. Opinion: Insufficient attention was paid to the human factor i.e. training security personnel to an acceptable standard. *It was said that more was achieved in aviation security in the few years leading up to the Olympics than had been achieved in the previous thirty years.*

2. As a regular attendee at international aviation security seminars sponsored by IATA in the period 1996-2002 I formed the opinion that Australian standards of performance in aviation security equaled or were superior to the performance standards described and observed in Europe and North America. By the year 2000 Australia was in some facets of aviation security a decade ahead of other developed countries.

3. As a representative on the ICM sponsored by DoTaRS for about five years my overriding impression was of the continuous struggle by aviation security managers to overcome financial objections by airport and airline management to implementing the standards DoTaRS attempted to introduce. Myopic management concerned primarily with profit producing customer service priorities and cost cutting invariably opposed the introduction of new security technologies or systems. Very little credence was given to risk management practices or corporate accountability.

4. In almost twenty years participation in Airport Security Committees (ASC) numerous security breaches were regularly reported and described. The overall impression gained was that enforcement of regulations was virtually non-existent. Breaches of security by on-airport workers invariably went un-punished for fear of alienating Unions.

5. Starting from a base in the mid-1990's when the Federal Airports Corporation (FAC) representatives strenuously denied that there was any significant threat to aviation security in Australia, privatization of airports introduced risk management practices into the aviation security discipline as corporate owners evaluated the risk exposures to their investments. The flaw (if it could be called that) in this cultural development was the emphasis on counter-terrorism in the context of regulations and legislation, and the almost total avoidance of any consideration of criminal activity on airports; criminal activity not being within the purview of DoTaRS.

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Explanation
Report 400 deals extensively with the issues of security technology and I would not propose to deal with that aspect. For a period, Technology was seen as the answer to aviation security challenges, the "silver bullet" that would solve all problems. In the culture of technology the human factor received inadequate attention.

Media reporting in recent days that alleged the issue of so-called "day passes" to casual security personnel who may not have been subjected to security clearance processes, prompted my concerns. ICM participants were trying to eliminate the issue of "day passes" and "visitor passes" to airside areas at least five years ago. The practice of allowing people who have not been security cleared into airside areas is fraught with danger. I earnestly recommend the practice be eliminated forthwith and the existing regulations properly enforced.

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Submission
The Aviation Security Identification Card (ASIC) program is, in my opinion, the essential element for compliance by airport and airline operators. Assuming the ASIC program has not substantially changed since 2003, (the limit of my knowledge) I recall that the essence of the check against police records was limited to the record of convictions for a specified range of offences. At that time, the processing time was lengthy and caused many administrative problems for operators. It was also my experience that State police services were inconsistent in prioritising the entry of data into the criminal record system. For a variety of understandable reasons relating to resource allocation, data recording convictions can take weeks or months to be entered into the database. The database itself might be considered unreliable or inaccurate. (Hopefully these deficiencies have been eliminated.)
It was also a concern that for Legal and Privacy reasons access to the records of the various Police Bureaux of Criminal Intelligence (BCI) and Intelligence databases relating to terrorism suspects were not routine parts of the process at that time. Until the security checking process includes these processes the ASIC system will not routinely eliminate persons suspected of involvement in criminal activity especially drug trafficking. I understand that the ASIO database is now scanned for persons of interest in a counter-terrorism context. The quality and relevance of the Intelligence available is clearly critical to the effectiveness of the clearance process.

These identified flaws in the ASIC program have debased the value of the ASIC in the perception of management that looks to find excuses to object to finding the money to pay for employees to be ASIC processed. "Day passes" and the abuse of "visitor passes" are by-products of the non-compliance mindset of operator management obsessed with cost control. Excuses put forward for "bending the rules" on airside access include not wishing to inconvenience operators of retail businesses in terminals. *Statements have been made that imposing regulatory compliance on construction companies would prohibit some companies from airport work because of the criminal records of their employees.*
The ASIC Program in itself is adequate for the purpose. However, the lack of enforcement provisions and actions assume attitudes of personal responsibility no longer relevant in today's society. The vast majority of airline and airport workers are "fit and proper persons" to be employed in the industry. Some are not. A culture of voluntary compliance will not deal with persons whose standards of behaviour are less

than acceptable. Enforcement measures are required to eliminate those persons that present an unacceptable risk.

Airline and airport management per se does not exhibit a significant understanding of the principle that effective risk management enhances profit opportunities. Failure to practice risk management can result in what has been termed the "Pan Am syndrome". *(The world's largest airline collapsed after a series of catastrophic security bungles resulted in the traveling public losing confidence in the carrier's reputation.)*

Recognising that the Act and Regulations are in reality minimum standards and that airport and airline security programs are the detail by which compliance is meant to be delivered, the excuse of cost controls has resulted in deliberate non-compliance with respect to security awareness training for on-airport staff. The development of a training regime covering aircrew and cabin crew resulted in a program of regular security awareness training sessions for new employees over the ten or so years of my involvement. No funds were allocated for the security awareness training of engineering or maintenance staff with daily access to airside, nor was any provision made for recurrent training despite the practice of renewing ASIC every five years. Compliance with the requirement to train new crewmembers was in reality in response to CASA requirements because it was perceived by management that CASA had the facility and the will to impose penalties for non-compliance. The key to compliance was clearly the enforcement aspect.

If financial pressures impacted on the operator's viability, one of the first casualties was invariably security or safety training.

(In the post 9/11 and Bali bombing periods when airlines in the Asia-Pacific region were struggling to survive and airports experienced severe downturns as a direct result of catastrophic security failures, the first expenditures cut included security and safety training for employees and contractors.)

In recent years priority has understandably been accorded to airport and airline security relating to the threat posed by passengers and their luggage. Minimal resources were allocated to the Regulated Agent program for airfreight. It is to be hoped that this deficiency has been addressed, and I note the recent advances in managing the security of ports and shipping. These programs are directly related to the aviation security discipline because efficient aviation security programs will deflect criminal activity to other "softer" targets. The principles of Aviation Security are applicable and adaptable to any industry vital to the national interest.

(In October 2002 I participated in a small team of specialists involved in designing the Regulated Agent program for Singapore's Changi Airport Air Freight Centre. That program gave Changi Airport a cost effective and thorough airfreight security program said to be superior to any in the developed world. In designing the program models of existing programs from Europe and the US were discarded as ineffective and the Changi program was designed "from the ground up". In 2003 the authorities there were planning to extend the program to the shipping industry.)

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6th June 2005.