

Senator, the Hon Bill Heffernan
Chair, Senate Standing Committee on
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Suite SG-62
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Heffernan

I write regarding statements made at the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Estimates Hearing on 28 May 2015 and the answer to a question taken on notice at the 24 February 2015 hearing in relation to a 'breakdown in communication' at Essendon airport.

In some instances, our statements have incorrectly described the runways that were being used at the time of the incident.

Question on Notice

Airservices provided an incorrect answer to a question taken on notice at the Budget Estimates May 2014 hearing conducted on 29 May 2014, which I would like to correct. In answering Question on Notice 156, Airservices provided an answer including the following text:

- (i) *Melbourne Tower was using an operating mode where normal departures were off Runway 27 and not off Runway 16. This required every 16 departure (referred to as an 'off mode' departure) to be individually coordinated with Essendon Tower. This coordination would have identified any potential conflict between an Essendon and Melbourne flight and would have resulted in a separation strategy being agreed upon. This requirement is outlined in the LOA.*

... The event that triggered the breakdown of communication being detected was an 'off mode' departure from Melbourne being identified as a potential conflict with an arrival to Runway 26 at Essendon during one of these coordination events between Melbourne and Essendon Tower.

Please be advised that the operating mode being used by Melbourne Tower was Runway 16 for departures and arrivals. In this operating mode, departures from Runway 16 at Melbourne would not have been individually coordinated with Essendon Tower, however any potential conflicts would still have been identified

through requirements in the LOA to coordinate any go-around from either Essendon or Melbourne between the two tower controllers.

I enclose a standalone copy of the corrected response to Question 156.

Hansard

During the Budget Estimates hearing on 28 May 2015, Mr Hood inadvertently answered a question on runway usage at Melbourne airport incorrectly.

The excerpt appears in Hansard as follow:

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Senator XENOPHON: Runway 16 was being used the whole time?

Mr Hood: My understanding in this particular event is runway 27 in Melbourne was being used for departures, runway 16 for arrivals.

The correct answer is that Runway 16 was being used for both departures and arrivals.

In our review of this matter, we have confirmed that these errors relate only to evidence provided to the Committee in February and May of this year. The errors were inadvertently introduced during the preparation of evidence about the incident that took place in 2013, which was in response to questions from the Committee. All information that was provided to CASA and the ATSB at the time of the incident was correct.

I take this opportunity to advise the Committee that the error in the evidence provided does not substantively change the answers provided in terms of the broader issue and subsequent questions.

I wish to apologise to the Committee for the error and trust that this appropriately clarifies the situation.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Staib
Chief Executive Officer

2 July 2015

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2014 / 2015
Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 156

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: Airservices Australia

Topic: CIRRIIS Report

Proof Hansard Page: Written

Senator Xenophon, Nick asked:

Cirrus #ATS 0125061 states that the ML TAC received coordination from Essendon Tower that it was unable to separate its Runway 26 aircraft from Melbourne's departures but the ML TAC did not subsequently pass the coordination to the Melbourne approach controller. LOA_3263 para 4.5.3 (as provided in answer to QoN 237) indicates that a number of parties have responsibilities when Melbourne is using Runway 16 for departures and Essendon Tower is unable to separate its Runway 26 instrument approach from the Melbourne departures:

1. What is the "MPL" and what relationship does it have to the ML TAC?
2. What is the "MLC" and what relationship does it have to the ML TAC?
3. What is the "MAE" and what relationship does it have to the ML TAC?
4. What is the "MLA" and what relationship does it have to the ML TAC?
5. Did Melbourne Tower receive coordination that Essendon Tower was unable to separate its Runway 26 instrument approach aircraft prior to further Melbourne departures being approved (i.e. the provisions of LOA is the 3263 para 4.5.3 (3) had become effective)?
6. What event occurred that triggered the detection of the breakdown of communication some 3 hours prior?
7. Can Airservices provide a copy of the radar tapes it gave ATSB regarding this incident?
8. Can Airservices explain why the provision of the radar tapes requested in QoN #237 (5) is complex and would require a significant diversion of resources?
9. Can Airservices explain why the provision of the relevant Essendon Tower, Melbourne Tower and Melbourne Approach Airways Operation Journal entries for the incident is complex and would require a significant diversion of resources?

Answer:

As noted in Airservices response to QON SQ1400293 from October 2014, this incident related to a breakdown of communication where a documented procedure was not correctly followed.

The Melbourne Terminal Area Coordinator (ML TAC) was advised by Essendon Tower that weather conditions at Essendon had deteriorated to a level where Essendon Tower would not be able to visually separate aircraft in the event that there was a missed approach (go around) by an arrival to Runway 26 at Essendon at the same time as a departure or missed approach from Runway 16 at Melbourne. The ML TAC did not communicate this information to the Melbourne Approach controllers.

In this type of weather scenario, Melbourne Approach controllers would sequence Essendon Runway 26 arrivals with additional spacing from Runway 16 departures at Melbourne and also Runway 16 arrivals to account for the possibility of a missed approach.

Air traffic systems are designed with many layers of defence to ensure that in the rare cases where errors are made, these are detected and recovered. While the breakdown of communication did not cause any loss of separation to occur, the event did highlight an opportunity for making the system safer which has been acted upon.

Despite the breakdown in communication, additional coordination requirements were in place and were effective, which ensured that safety was not compromised:

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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- i) Melbourne Tower was using an operating mode where departures were from Runway 16. If there had been a missed approach at Essendon, this would need to be individually coordinated between Melbourne and Essendon Towers. This coordination would have identified any potential conflict between an Essendon and Melbourne flight and would have resulted in a separation strategy being agreed upon. This requirement is outlined in the LOA.
- ii) If there had been an unexpected missed approach by an aircraft landing on Runway 16 at Melbourne (and there were none during the period in question), that would also have required coordination from Melbourne Tower directly to Essendon Tower to agree upon a resolution. This requirement is outlined in the LOA.

There were a total of six arrivals for Runway 26 at Essendon during the period in question.

With respect to roles, Melbourne Planner (MPL), Melbourne Approach East (MAE) and Melbourne Terminal Area Coordinator (ML TAC) are air traffic control positions in the Melbourne Terminal Control Unit. ML TAC and MPL are sometimes combined. Melbourne Tower Coordinator (MLC) and Melbourne Tower Aerodrome Controller (MLA) are air traffic control position in the Melbourne Tower.

The incident was reported and reviewed in accordance with Airservices normal safety management processes which also include routine notification to both the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA).

As outlined in Airservices response to Questions on Notice from October 2014 (and Airservices response to the REPCON), an interim system enhancement was implemented while coordination procedures were reviewed to look for further opportunities for improvement. An enhancement to local documentation to reinforce coordination requirements was subsequently identified and implemented in 2013.

Neither the ATSB nor CASA considered any further action was required in relation to this event.