

Chief Commissioner Greg Hood opening remarks for Senate Estimates

22 November 2016

Senators, I commenced my appointment as the Australian Transport Safety Bureau's Chief Commissioner on 1 July 2016.

I would like to place on record the service of Martin Dolan, my predecessor in this role. While Martin's real and significant contribution to improving transport safety has been widely acknowledged, it was his passion, energy and commitment to maintaining the ATSB's reputation as a world-leading safety investigation body that will be remembered as his most enduring qualities.

I am privileged and humbled to lead what is a world-class transport safety investigation agency.

The ATSB exists to improve the safety of—and public confidence in—aviation, marine and rail transport through independent investigation of transport accidents and other safety occurrences, and through safety data recording, analysis and research.

Over the past two years, the ATSB has transitioned to becoming the national rail safety investigator - we now have primary responsibility for investigating rail safety accidents and incidents on regional networks and metropolitan passenger networks in all states and territories other than Queensland. Although I note Queensland has recently announced that they will be adopting the national arrangements in the near future.

We have continued to lead the unprecedented operational search for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370. Since 8 May 2014, when MH370 disappeared with 239 souls on board on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, and at the request of the Malaysian Government, the ATSB has been leading the search operations for the Boeing 777 aircraft, in the Southern Indian Ocean. This search remains a major priority for the ATSB.

ATSB technical specialists have examined a number of items of aircraft debris, which were discovered on the shorelines of western Indian Ocean states and our Government continues to work with our Malaysian and Chinese counterparts to ensure that they are kept apprised of the search progress and to enable joint decisions to be made when required.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the dedication and commitment of the many professional staff that have contributed to the largest search of its

kind in human history, not only from the ATSB, but in Australia from the DSTG, CSIRO, AMSA Geoscience Australia, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Defence Force and numerous universities and museums. Internationally, we have been working closely with our counterparts in the UK, USA and France, and also with Inmarsat, Thales, Boeing and many others. We have also met with a number of next-of-kin, and continue to provide updates to them as the search progresses.

We have also continued to work on the reopened investigation into the Norfolk Island ditching accident on 18 November 2009. This is a complex and thorough investigation with an extensive amount of material gathered, including the recovery and analysis of the cockpit voice and flight data recorders from the aircraft 50m beneath the sea off Norfolk Island.

The collection and analysis of a large volume of evidence for this investigation has taken longer than originally foreseen. However, the ATSB now has sufficient evidence to establish findings across a number of lines of inquiry. The ATSB is in a position to finalise a draft report which is expected to be released to directly involved parties by the end of the year.

I consider that my prior appointments as Executive Manager Operations at the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, and Executive General Manager for Airservices Australia, provides me with a unique perspective in relation to transport safety matters. I am also conscious of my accountabilities in relation to managing any perceived conflict of interest in relation to any of the portfolios I previously held.

I have therefore, in relation to the Norfolk ditching accident, declared the potential for a perceived conflict of interest to the ATSB Commission on 8 June 2016, before I commenced as Chief Commissioner, and also to the Minister in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*

I have undertaken not to participate in the Commission's consideration of the investigation or the approval process for the release of this report and the ATSB's Aviation Commissioner, Chris Manning, will be the Commission spokesperson for the report.

I am considerably impressed that the ATSB has produced over 1000 reports since 2009, which include a number of significant and widely-acclaimed investigation reports that have reinforced the agency's continued standing as a world-leading transport safety investigator.

In this respect I would like to highlight the following reports:

- The oxygen cylinder failure and depressurization of a Qantas Boeing 747 carrying 369 passengers and crew and diversion to Manila
- The in-flight upset of a Qantas Airbus A330 which injured 110 passengers and 12 crew members near Exmouth
- The inflight uncontained engine failure on QF32, an Airbus A380 over Indonesia carrying 469 passengers and crew and the aircrafts return to Singapore
- The Emirates tailstrike and runway overrun of an Airbus A340 in Melbourne which was carrying 275 passengers and crew
- The Robinson R44 Fuel tank investigation and its systemic findings
- Many other rail and marine accidents and incidents.

We will continue to investigate the majority of accidents and serious incidents involving the travelling public. This is where there is the greatest risk of loss of life and the greatest likelihood of finding significant safety issues that lead to important safety actions and improvements.

We will better utilise this data to identify safety trends in aviation, rail and marine sectors.

There are many challenges facing transport safety into the future. There is significant growth in all modes of transport and we are seeing some of the effects of emerging technology such as crew data input errors and the use of remotely piloted aircraft, or drones.

We will work with aviation, rail and marine operators, industry associations and regulators to highlight safety concerns identified from our occurrence data and investigation findings. I lead a team committed to doing all we can to maintain and enhance transport safety in Australia.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Legislation Committee

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By: *Greg Hood, ATSB*

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