

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Additional Budget Estimates February 2009  
**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

**Question No.:** AA 01

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia  
**Topic:** Air Traffic Controllers Pay Claim  
**Hansard Pages:** 60-61 (24/02/09)

**Senator McGauran asked:**

**Senator McGAURAN**—None of us want to inflame an issue where, heaven forbid, this union has been running amok for years and now, suddenly, we are all very sensitive about getting them to the table. The point that you have reached now is because the Minister, to his credit, got tough on the union and you, Mr Russell, also got tough on the union. So sensitivity does not work with this union. Take it from me, I get all their emails. I know your negotiations are at a very sensitive point, but tell me: is the union's 63 per cent ambit claim in regard to a pay rise still on the table?

**Senator Conroy**—You are asking Mr Russell to discuss the ongoing negotiations. I think you could well take a leaf out of Senator MacDonald's sensitive and appropriate questions. We will take that on notice.

**Answer:**

Since this question was asked, Airservices and Civil Air have formally agreed the terms of a new collective agreement.

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**Question No.:** AA 02

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia  
**Topic:** Air Traffic Controllers Sick Leave  
**Hansard Pages:** 61-62 (24/02/09)

**Senator McGAURAN**—You said in the last estimates that this sort of wildcat sick leave tactic has been used, and you have accepted it as a tactic used—a very dangerous one. You said it was used by a small number of controllers. Now, is that the union’s view too to you? Are they saying, ‘hey, we don’t know who these people are and we have no control on these wildcat sick leave strikes’?

**Senator Conroy**—You are now asking the officer to give you an opinion.

**Senator McGAURAN**—He gave the same opinion on page 75 of *Hansard* last time.

**Senator Conroy**—We are now in a situation where we are close, hopefully, to resolving the issue. I think Mr Russell would be wise to take it on notice, given that we are potentially close to a resolution. I know, Senator McGauran, you want to help resolve that situation.

**Senator McGAURAN**—So how close? Are we weeks away?

**Senator Conroy**—I think Mr Russell used the words ‘crucial in the next few days?’

**Mr Russell**—Chairman, I am hopeful that the next few days will be decisive in terms of these negotiations. I am very happy to take these questions on notice, but I make the point again that these negotiations are at a delicate stage and I just do not want to say something that may jeopardise them, with great respect.

**Answer:**

Airservices and Civil Air formally agreed the terms of a new collective agreement on Friday, 27 February 2009.

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**Question No.:** AA 03

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia  
**Topic:** Air Traffic Controllers Sick Leave  
**Hansard Pages:** 64-65 (24/02/09)

**Senator O'BRIEN**—Mr Russell, I think it was in the last Budget Estimates you told this Committee: *At this stage we anticipate achieving the full staffing complement by the end of August with new controllers flowing to the system over the coming months. This is just the beginning of our increased recruitment activities with a further 80 to 100 ATCs to be recruited per year over the next five years.* How did we go and how are we going?

**Mr Russell**—We have made some very good progress in this area. Our staffing issue at the moment is okay. The way we deploy our people can be improved, however. It is a combination of bringing additional staff into the organisation, as I indicated at that previous hearing, over the next couple of years and reorganising the way we deploy them. If I could just provide you with a little update, our current requirement for operational air traffic controllers is 893 positions. We currently have 945 air traffic controllers. During 2008, we had 49 retirements and resignations, 14 of whom left to go overseas and 25 in fact rejoined us, most of whom are expats from overseas. We have no difficulty attracting what we would call *ab initio* trainees. Recently, we put a small advertisement on our website for 30 positions for experienced controllers. We had 208 applications; 162 of them were from overseas, and many of those are air traffic controllers of experience wanting to come back to Australia. So there is not an issue there, we think, in terms of the immediate staffing issues. We know very well that if we sat on our hands, so to speak, we would have a problem because the average age of our air traffic controllers is 42. Twenty per cent of them are older than 50. So we do need to continue to train them, and that has been part of our ongoing program.

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**Senator O'BRIEN**—Mr Russell, going back to what you told us, did you in fact get to your full staffing complement at the end of August last year?

**Mr Russell**—We have the right number of air traffic controllers for our requirements against our establishment, Senator.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—I am asking about last August, and the prediction you made.

**Mr Russell**—Yes, we were there, but I do make the point there is still a deployment issue that we need to continue to work on.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—I am not sure what that means. Can you explain it?

**Mr Russell**—It goes to the question of the way we are organised on a sector basis. There are some 32 sectors across the country, and we have people endorsed specifically to some of those sectors, so you do not have quite the flexibility. That is part of the issue that we are working on with this broader reform in this air traffic group.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—Which sectors are we—if I can put it this way—under-equipped for?

**Mr Russell**—I would take that question on notice, if you do not mind, Senator, and provide you an answer.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—All right. I appreciate that.....

**Answer:**

Airservices has sufficient numbers of air traffic controllers across all operational sectors to staff core console operations (including prescribed breaks), supervision, recreation leave (6 weeks per annum) and the required refresher training.

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**Question No.:** AA 04

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia  
**Topic:** Air Traffic Controllers Sick Leave  
**Hansard Pages:** 65 (24/02/09)

**Senator O'BRIEN**—.....I appreciate that. Given that I was asking questions early last year about problems at Launceston Airport, can you bring us up to date with the provision of air traffic control services at Launceston Airport?

**Mr Russell**—I will ask my colleague, Jason Harfield, who is the GM, Air Traffic Control, to answer that question, Senator.

**Mr Harfield**—With Launceston, we have brought up the staffing establishment to six, which includes the manager. On location, we have another recruitment exercise that was completed late last year, and we expect to have another trainee down there in the next 12 months. We have just recently also changed the roster down in Launceston from being a two-person roster of 10-hour shifts each, to have three people on under normal circumstances throughout the day to provide a level of redundancy for any sick leave, also to allow some extension to the rostered hours, if required.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—Has that overcome the problems that were being experienced?

**Mr Harfield**—We had a number of interruptions during January—four, compared to 25 for the previous 12 months. Those four in January appear to be a multitude of circumstances just after the New Year, where we had some illness in Launceston, and the people that would need to help to fill the shifts were unavailable due to the holiday period and were away at the time.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—So people were on leave?

**Mr Harfield**—They were not on leave; they were on days off but unavailable. However, we were able to limit the time the tower was shut to much smaller periods than what we previously had because we had a better roster in place that provided a level of redundancy.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—Did that have any impact on aircraft arrivals or departures?

**Mr Harfield**—Yes it did; they were in the normal out-of-hours mode during that time.

**Senator O'BRIEN**—How many aircraft did it affect?

**Mr Harfield**—I will have to take it on notice, Senator.

**Answer:**

Thirty-three aircraft were affected in total during the four service interruptions at Launceston Airport in January 2009.

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**Question No.:** AA 05

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia

**Topic:** Air Traffic Controllers Collective Agreement Update

**Hansard Pages:** 65 (24/02/09)

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Mr Russell, perhaps as a question on notice—hopefully, the issue is resolved shortly—could you tell us the outcome of the negotiations over the next couple of days, weeks? What I am doing is putting this on notice so that before 17 March someone can give us a report on where we are at by 17 March and, hopefully, things will be hunky-dory by then.

**Mr Russell**—I will be pleased to, Senator.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Could you also particularly make sure in the report that you make reference to any arrangement that has been made about the issues which my colleagues were asking you about—that is the question of what seems, on the face of it, to be unconstrained sick leave. Take that particular issue on notice, but that will hopefully be after it is all over.

**Mr Russell**—Yes, okay.

**Answer:**

Refer to AA 02.

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**Question No.:** AA 06

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia  
**Topic:** Air Traffic Control Contingency Plans  
**Hansard Pages:** 60-61 (24/02/09)

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Mr Russell, again, I assume—and correct me if I am wrong—the Minister is well briefed, either from you or from his own sources, on the impact any industrial action might have on the economy, Australian jobs, emergency services—

**Senator Conroy**—I am not sure Mr Russell is in a position to give an assessment of what—

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—I will ask you then, Minister. I assume the Minister, Mr Albanese, has been briefed, either by Airservices or someone else, on the impact any industrial action could have on the economy, jobs, international and regional airlines—

**Senator Conroy**—I am sure Mr Albanese is very conscious of the importance of the aviation industry to the broader economy.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—My question was a little deeper than that: not only the aviation industry, but a cessation of operations of the Australian industry, the impact it could have on Australia in these difficult financial times.

**Senator Conroy**—Perhaps you misheard me. I said the impact of it on the broader Australian economy, agreeing with your question.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Okay. So he is aware of—

**Senator Conroy**—I am sure he is well across his duties and understandings in this area.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Do you, Minister or Mr Russell, have any contingency planning and actions of what the Government might put in place if—

**Senator Conroy**—First, that is a question about government policy and I will take it on notice.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—I am encouraged by Mr Russell's original response that this is all now hypothetical, but it did seem fairly serious a while back. I was just wondering what contingency plans the government might have had in place, and so you will take that on notice for me. Thank you.

**Senator Conroy**—Pleased to take it on notice.

.....  
**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Okay. I do not want you to disclose any Cabinet material, but this is an issue that is wider than either the relevant Transport Minister or the Workplace Relations Minister, which would be a matter for Cabinet. Could I ask if the Government, through Cabinet, has contingency plans if things go wrong?

**Senator Conroy**—I am happy to take that on notice and give you any information the Minister considers relevant.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—I was asking you, really, in your role as a Cabinet Minister.

**Senator Conroy**—Right. I am not in a position I can discuss cabinet considerations.

**Answer:**

Airservices Australia has advised that the impact of any industrial action by air traffic controllers on the provision of air traffic management services was discussed with airlines likely to be impacted by potential disruptions. The details of operational contingency measures to be implemented would have been finalised if necessary with regard to the particular nature and effect of any industrial action taken.

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**Question No.:** AA 07

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia

**Topic:** Air Traffic Control Contingency Plans

**Hansard Pages:** 63 (24/02/09)

**McGAURAN**—Okay. The contingency plan which my colleague raised would still be in play because the agreement has not been finalised yet—there may be many a slip between cup and lip, I think the saying is. Having been in government, we know there is a contingency plan, and this Committee has a right to ask and know what it would be. What is the contingency plan?

**Senator Conroy**—As I said, we will take that on notice and any information that is available that Mr Albanese is willing to give you we will get for you.

**Senator McGAURAN**—But that is a question that ought to be answered, not a question of opinion.

**Senator Conroy**—I did not say it was an opinion. I said I would get you an answer. We have taken it on notice.

**Answer:**

Refer to AA 06.

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**Question No.:** AA 08

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia

**Topic:** Reviews

**Hansard Pages:** Written Question

**Senator McGauran asked:**

1. How many Reviews are currently being undertaken in the portfolio/agency or affecting the portfolio agency?
2. When will each of these reviews be concluded?
3. Which Reviews have been completed since Supplementary Budget Estimates 2008?
4. When will the Government be responding to the respective reviews that have been completed?
5. What is the total number of Reviews both completed and ongoing in the portfolio/agency or affecting the portfolio agency since November 2007?
6. What is the estimated cost of these Reviews?
7. What further reviews are planned for 2009?

**Answer:**

1-7 Nil.



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**Question No.:** AA 09

**Division/Agency:** Airservices Australia

**Topic:** Consultancies

**Hansard Pages:** Written Question

**Senator McGauran asked:**

1. How many consultancies have been undertaken or are underway since November 2007?
2. Please identify the name of the consultant, the subject matter of the consultancy, the duration and cost of the consultancy, and the method of procurement (ie. open tender, direct source, etc).
3. Please also include total value for all consultancies.
4. Do you stand by Government Tenders website ([www.tenders.gov.au](http://www.tenders.gov.au)) and what changes or corrections have been made to it since 18 February 2009? Are you up to date with reporting requirements?
5. How many consultancies are planned / budgeted for this calendar year?
6. Have these been published in your Annual Procurement Plan (APP) on the AusTender website and if not why not?
7. In each case please identify the subject matter, duration, cost and method of procurement as above, and the name of the consultant if known.

**Answer:**

- 1-7 Airservices Australia uses a wide range and large number of consultants each year, particularly with regard to technical aspects of the organisation's extensive capital works program. As a non-appropriation funded agency, Airservices does not structure its accounts to automatically identify separate consultancy items. As such, collation of the information required to answer these questions would need to be undertaken manually and require each individual consultancy to be reviewed, resulting in an unreasonable diversion of staff resources from their current work program.