

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. AAA 01

Division/Agency: Aviation and Airports
Topic: Airport Rescue and Fire Fighting Services
Hansard Page: 67 (21/10/08)

Senator Ian MacDonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The airport is a dual operational airport, as you rightly say, but I think the civil side is actually owned by Queensland Airports Limited now—the buildings and all that—and I think they share the runway. Is there some provision that you are aware of that restricts who can do the fire and rescue services, apart from it being mentioned in regulations that they are eligible? Is there some other requirement?

If I own an airport and want an eligible person to do it, is there anything to stop me doing that, subject to CASA approval of operational plans?

Mr Doherty—I would have to refresh my memory on the way the regulations work and whether it relates to a list of airports or to airports generally. There are regulations that basically provide Airservices Australia with the role of rescue and fire-fighting services at airports and regulations that in effect give them a monopoly of that exercise except to the extent that it is lifted by the—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I understand that is the case in Townsville.

Mr Doherty—That has been lifted in Townsville, yes. The economic regulatory control has been lifted in that case. It would then become a matter of commercial agreement with those in charge and obtaining the necessary safety approval.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—How long would it take you to get your office to check whether in February or early this year your branch or someone in the Department wrote to both Airservices and Defence about this particular issue?

Mr Doherty—That should not take long.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Perhaps some of your people are watching this back in the department. Perhaps they could find that letter for me. My understanding is that it is a letter signed by either you or the Departmental Secretary indicating that the Minister had a view on things that occurred at Townsville airport and had written to both Airservices and Defence making those views known.

Mr Doherty—I will certainly check that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Thank you very much for that.

Answer:

On 5 March 2008, the former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Mike Mrdak, wrote to Airservices Australia and the Department of Defence advising of the Australian Government's decision for Delta Fire Service Pty Ltd (Delta) to remain on the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations (CASR) "Table of eligible providers" for ARFFS at Townsville Airport. Mr Mrdak provided the same advice to Queensland Airports Limited (QAL), owner of Delta and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA).

Mr Mrdak's advice also noted that Delta had to undertake a number of steps to comply with CASR Part 139H including the preparation of an agreed transition plan.

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Question No. AAA 02

Division/Agency: Aviation and Airports

Topic: National Aviation Policy Statement

Hansard Page: 70 (21/10/08)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—In relation to the response to Question On Notice No. 6 from 28 May—and you are better than me if you can remember what that was—which dealt with representations made to the minister as part of the development of a green paper, how many submissions or representations have been so far received and how many of those are subject to confidentiality requests?

Mr Doherty—I do not have the exact numbers. The final number of submissions to the issues paper was 291, I believe. Of those, the vast majority were indicated as being suitable for publication and are in fact displayed on our website. A small number—and I can take the number on notice—were confidential.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Are they subject to confidentiality requests?

Mr Doherty—Yes. We advised when we invited submissions that people should indicate whether they objected to their submission being made public, and a number did that.

Answer:

As at 10 November 2008 a total of 295 submissions have been received in response to the *Towards a National Aviation Policy Statement* Issues Paper. Of the total number of submissions received, 18 submitters requested that their submissions be treated confidentially.

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Question No. AAA 03

Division/Agency: Aviation and Airports
Topic: Bankstown Airport – Renewal of Lease
Hansard Page: 71 (21/10/08)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Are you aware of the dispute between Air King New South Wales Pty Ltd and Bankstown Airport in relation to the renewal of a lease?

Mr Doherty—What was the first name?

Senator HEFFERNAN—Air King New South Wales.

Mr Doherty—I am not personally across that.

Senator HEFFERNAN—They are all a bit unhappy out there.

Ms Gosling—That has come to my attention, that Air King does have some issues with Bankstown Airport Corporation in relation to a lease on a site that they have.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It would be fair to say that for some years the Bankstown owners have been wanting to clean the place out, as it were, of some of the lower grade, as they see it, operators there. The tool that they have been using is a huge increase in rent. Will the Minister consider establishing a formal mediation process to deal with this and other similar disputes as recommended by the General Aviation Industry Action Agenda?

Senator Conroy—We will need to take that one on notice.

Answer:

The Final Report of the Strategic Industry Leader's Group of the General Aviation Industry Action Agenda included a recommendation that a formal mediation process be established at secondary capital city airports. Minister Albanese released the Action Agenda Report on 6 August 2008 to stimulate and inform discussion on general aviation issues. The issues and recommendations in the Action Agenda report are being considered by the Government in the broader context of the Aviation White Paper.

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Question No. AAA 04

Division/Agency: Aviation and Airports

Topic: Karumba Airport – Gulf of Carpentaria – Airstrip Upgrade

Hansard Page: 74 (21/10/08)

Senator Ian MacDonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I know you have received over the years requests from the Karumba airport in the Gulf of Carpentaria for assistance in (a) relocating but (b) upgrading the existing airport.

Mr Doherty—I am not aware of that specific example.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could you check that for me on notice and let me know if there is any merit in me encouraging the owners of the airport, which is the local shire council, to again approach the Department for assistance in the provision of an upgraded airstrip which is very essential for so many reasons—health, Indigenous matters and tourism—into that remote Gulf airport at Karumba?

Mr Doherty—We will provide you with the details of the program that we have and if the particular case meets the guidelines there may be a—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Could you check your records to make sure that you are not currently dealing with something in relation to the Karumba airport?

Mr Doherty—Certainly.

Answer:

The Mayor of Carpentaria Shire Council, Councillor Les Wilson, wrote to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, the Hon Gary Gray MP on 28 August 2008 and to the Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Michael Taylor, on 23 September 2008 seeking funding assistance to upgrade the Karumba airstrip.

Minister Albanese replied to the Mayor on 15 September 2008 advising Carpentaria Shire Council had submitted two applications for funding under Round Two of the Australian Government's Remote Aerodrome Safety Program (RASP) – a runway lighting upgrade project at Normanton aerodrome and a major airport upgrade at Karumba. While the Minister had approved funding of \$100,000 for the lighting upgrade at Normanton, he was unable to approve funding for the Karumba upgrade.

The purpose of the project was to upgrade the airport's runway to enable the operation of commercial air services into the airport using larger aircraft. This is outside the scope of the program which is focused on improving the safety and accessibility of airstrips to facilitate the delivery of non-commercial, essential goods and services. In addition, the project application did not have the required matching funding support from the Queensland Government.

The Parliamentary Secretary and the Secretary of the Department replied to Mayor Wilson along similar lines on 13 October and 22 October 2008 respectively.

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Question No. AAA 05

Division/Agency: Aviation and Airports
Topic: Sydney Airport – Landing Fee Charges
Hansard Page: 74 (21/10/08)

Senator Williams asked:

Senator WILLIAMS—Are you over the top of all the landing fee charges at Sydney airport?

Mr Doherty—At Sydney airport there would be a charge component for the air traffic control service and there would be a charge imposed by the airport. The charge imposed by the airport is negotiated between the airport and the airport operator, and the government's involvement is limited to a light-touch price-monitoring program so that there is an annual reporting of charges at that airport generally.

Senator WILLIAMS—There are some regulations in those landing fees to cover regional airlines of New South Wales so that the cost of landing fees do not go up by more than price of CPI. Is that correct? Are you familiar with that?

Mr Doherty—I would need to check the details. I am aware that there have been some specific arrangements set in train for regional operators at Sydney, but I am not able to pull the details to mind.

Senator WILLIAMS—Would you know how much these landing fees have gone up over the last couple of years? Could we access them anywhere? Are they all private knowledge now that the airport has been privatised?

Mr Doherty—I do not want to speculate. I can take that on notice and get the information about the arrangements for charges to the regional services of Sydney.

Senator WILLIAMS—The reason for my question is I recall—and I certainly was not a politician in those days—that when the Sydney airport was privatised to Macquarie Bank, the then Deputy Prime Minister or he could have been the Transport Minister, John Anderson, put regulations in so that regional airlines could not have their landing fees increased by more than the rate of inflation to protect some of the small airlines. I just wanted to ensure that it was still in place and still being monitored? That was my main reason for raising the question.

Mr Doherty—I understand. We will take that on notice.

Answer:

Regional air services at Sydney Airport are subject to price notification and price capping pursuant to Direction 30 and Declaration 91 issued under the *Trade Practices Act 1974*. This means that the total revenue weighted percentage increase of charges for regional air services should not exceed the annual Consumer Price Index. Furthermore, should Sydney Airport intend to increase the price of aeronautical services for regional airlines, it must notify the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

Sydney Airport's aeronautical charges are published on its website.