

Aviation Access Working Group

SUMMARY RECORD: MEETING 9

Date:	Wednesday 4 November 2010
Venue:	Qantas Meeting Rooms, Terminal 3, Sydney Airport
Time:	9:00am – 12:00pm
Attendees:	Australian Human Rights Commission Australian Federation of Disability Organisations Physical Disability Australia Deafness Forum of Australia Qantas Jetstar Virgin Blue Tiger Airways Regional Express Australian Airports Association Mayor of Ballina Attorney-General's Department Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Infrastructure and Transport (DOIT)
Apologies:	National Disability Services Physical Disability Australia Tiger Airways Board of Airline Representatives of Australia Regional Aviation Association of Australia Civil Aviation Safety Authority Attorney-General's Department Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Secretariat:	Department of Infrastructure and Transport

1. Welcome

The Chair apologised for the postponement of the meeting due to the Federal election and welcomed new representatives. The Chair noted the contributions to the AAWG of Nicole Lawder, former representative for Deafness Forum of Australia, and Robin Banks, former representative for Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO).

The Chair invited members to think about the future work of the AAWG and to raise any suggestions or feedback with the Secretariat.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) suggested the AAWG extend an invitation to the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, Senator the Hon Jan McLucas, to present her views and thoughts on aviation access. The Department of Infrastructure and Transport (DOIT) will make appropriate inquiries in this regard.

a) Agreement to draft minutes of the previous meeting on 20 May 2010.

Members accepted the minutes from Meeting 8, 20 May 2010.

b) Follow-up on action items from previous meeting.

FaHCSIA provided an update on the inter-jurisdictional working group concerning the standardisation of minimum standards for assistance animals. The working group comprises Commonwealth and State officials and has identified a number of issues. The working group will conduct public consultation at a later stage. FaHCSIA confirmed the intention was for the standards to apply in all public spaces.

The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) presented an overview of the requirements of the *Disability (Access to Premises-Buildings) Standards* (Premises Standards) and the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport* (Transport Standards) in relation to public transport buildings. The document describes the current obligations for building owners and the interaction between the Premises Standards and the Transport Standards. The AGD noted that standards applying to airport terminals were essentially the same but would be located under a new area of law. Members noted all new buildings must comply with the higher standard, with all old buildings transitioning to the standard by 2022.

ACTION AGD to include an indicative compliance timeframe in a schematic overview document.

Members noted that the terminology "mobility aid" was becoming problematic for airlines, particularly when differentiating between wheelchairs and scooters. Members discussed the size and weight restrictions due to aircraft design and the absence of standardised purchasing information, such as manufacturers specifications. Members noted the possibility that an existing committee has already looked at the compliance requirements in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) regarding use of mobility aids across all modes of transport.

It was noted that with the diversity in motorised mobility aids now available on the market, attention might be given to guidance on information and labelling and indicate whether a particular aid is suitable for mainstream public transport aircraft.

ACTION DOIT to identify any work currently underway in regard to the carriage of mobility aids in respect of requirements of the DDA and to investigate whether there is scope for the AAWG to contribute in relation to aviation requirements.

2. Disability Access Facilitation (DAF) Plans.

Members noted that the rate of completion of DAF Plans has been below expectations with one airline and 13 airports having published plans.

a) Qantas and Jetstar report on status of plans

Qantas advised that DAF Plans for both Qantas and Jetstar were significantly advanced. The development of the DAF Plans had resulted in a review of administrative and procedural processes, in particular the booking process and internal manuals.

b) Tiger report on status of plan

Tiger Airways advised that its DAF Plan had been drafted and was currently with its legal team for review.

c) Virgin Blue report on status of plan

Virgin Blue advised they had received feedback from both the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) on 20 October 2010 and Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) on 27 October 2010. Virgin Blue advised it will incorporate these comments into the final document which is expected to be completed by the end of November.

d) General discussion about DAF plans

The Chair noted an emerging theme indicated the process of developing the DAF Plans had raised internal issues that needed to be addressed by operators.

Development of the DAF Plans highlighted conflict between the facilitation of full access and compliance with security and safety requirements.

The Chair indicated that a lack of voluntary effort by industry to prepare DAF Plans could risk a frustrated government to move towards regulating to address access. Mr Innes expressed strong concerns about the slow progress and disclosed his intention to meet with relevant Ministers to call for regulatory action.

ACTION DOIT to follow up with major airports and airlines who have not indicated participation in the DAF Plan initiative.

DOIT to launch the DAF Plan webpage on the DOIT website and circulate a list of published plans to members.

Disability organisation members emphasised the importance of staff training in handling and facilitating passengers with disabilities and noted that performance by airline staff was inconsistent.

Members discussed the likely value of developing information and/or guidance to assist airlines deliver training to employees to promote specific competencies when facilitating passengers with disability. This was raised as a specific issue for smaller operators who face limitations in resourcing.

ACTION DOIT to initially approach member organisations to identify the topics and content, and the desired competency outcomes which might be covered in staff training material.

3. Infrastructure to provide Transport Standards Review update.

DOIT advised that the Government's response to the Transport Standards Review is expected to be released in the near future.

ACTION DOIT will forward the Government response to members when publicly released and arrange a briefing at the first meeting following release.

Other business

Airline members raised the issue of the carriage of assistance animals on aircraft, particularly the need to obtain special approval from CASA to carry assistance animals, other than those to assist vision and hearing impaired passengers.

Members identified differences in procedures for obtaining special approvals and suggested that a regulatory change to CAR 256A could address this issue.

ACTION DOIT, in consultation with CASA and other AAWG members, to prepare a background paper on the process for special approvals for carriage of assistance animals and to identify options for streamlining the approval process.

Members noted the advice from DOIT that consideration of the disability access assistance service could more effectively be progressed on the receipt of additional DAF Plans. The Chair indicated the issue will remain a standing agenda item.

While noting the expenses for voluntary organisations to attend AAWG, DOIT advised that no funding has been provided to the Department for associated AAWG membership expenses.

Arrangements for next meeting.

The next meeting of AAWG is tentatively scheduled for March 2011 at the same venue in Sydney.