



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Government



Review of Aviation Security Screening: Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

More than most other nations, Australia's aviation industry plays a critical role in the nation's economy and connectivity. The number of passenger movements through all Australian airports is forecast to increase by 4 per cent per annum over the next 20 years. As a result, passenger movements are expected to double by 2025–26 so that approximately 63 million passengers will be moving through Sydney Airport, 46.4 million through Melbourne Airport, 30 million through Brisbane Airport, 17.7 million through Perth Airport and 11.7 million through Adelaide Airport. With this projected growth, the challenge for Government and industry will be to ensure that the required security outcomes are achieved in a cost-effective manner while the movement of people and their baggage to their aircraft is facilitated through screening points in a timely and dignified manner.

The continued success of Australia's aviation industry will be driven in large measure by public confidence in the safety and security of regular public transport air services. To safeguard against unlawful interference with aviation, a layered approach to preventive security is underpinned by the *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004*. It includes measures for passenger and checked baggage screening. Screening is the process by which authorised screening officers inspect individuals and their property to deter and prevent the carriage of weapons or items that are considered to be a threat to an aircraft. In Australia, the Aviation Transport Security Regulations 2005 prescribe the type of items that are prohibited.

To ensure Australia is at the leading edge of screening systems and methodologies into the future, the Australian Government initiated a comprehensive Review of Aviation Security Screening in late 2007. The Review had several catalysts: the need to analyse and review the legislative framework; the growth in tourism and the aviation sector; expansion of the security regime to smaller industry participants; labour market pressures on the recruitment and retention of screening staff; and more recent legislative changes such as



To safeguard against unlawful interference with aviation, a layered approach to preventive security is underpinned by the *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004*.

the introduction of liquids, aerosols and gels screening and the introduction of 100 per cent checked baggage screening to domestic airports.

In March 2008, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, appointed an external advisory group comprised of aviation industry leaders to guide the Review.

The Review examined a wide range of issues affecting aviation security screening, including the purpose of screening, service delivery and performance, national consistency, passenger experience, human factors, screening point design, the regulatory environment and the role of various technologies in the screening process. The Review identified several issues that impinge upon the effectiveness and efficiency of aviation security screening in Australia and makes 27 recommendations for improvements to screening.

At the core of these recommendations is the notion that aviation security screening must continually improve to ensure that it is effective, efficient and sustainable as Australia's aviation industry continues to grow.

For this to occur, all stakeholders—government, industry and the public—must clearly understand the purpose of screening. The Review has concluded that a definition of the purpose of screening could be articulated in a more easily understood form.

Defining the purpose of screening necessarily informs the types of items that should be prohibited from aircraft to prevent acts of unlawful interference. The Review considered the efficacy of the prohibited items list in Australia. It concluded that the evolving threat environment now requires a greater focus by screeners on risks linked to explosives, associated devices and their constituent parts. Equally, given the fact that new aviation security measures to protect the flight deck are now operationally mature, there would be clear benefits to applying a more relevant risk-based framework to screening persons and their carry-on items. Such a framework should focus on higher order threats to the security of a screened air service, such as explosive items, and less on lower order risk items which do not pose a high risk to the security integrity of an aircraft cabin, and the flight deck in particular.

The Review considers that there would be benefits for government agencies and industry stakeholders to regularly review the screening measures in place (including regulatory tools such as the list of prohibited items) to ensure they remain relevant and are commensurate with the nature and level of threats.

The passenger screening process in Australia has not changed significantly since it was developed to counter the threat of hijacking in the 1970s. It is primarily designed to detect metal weapons, either on the passenger or in carry-on luggage. This process is less effective in detecting non-metallic weapons or explosives concealed on a person. A random and continuous explosives trace detection measure was introduced in Australia in 2003 to mitigate this risk.

Despite research and development into new technologies, and operational trials, the technology presently deployed at screening points at Australian airports (and in most overseas airports) has remained essentially the same for many years. The security threats the equipment was originally designed to counter have evolved, and this has created the need for additional security requirements. In fact, the technology has advanced comparatively little yet it is being required to address threats of a range and complexity out of all proportion to expectations at the time of the technology's original deployment.

It is important that as the threats to aviation evolve, so too does screening technology so that contemporary threat items can be identified. The Review has noted that several next generation technologies with demonstrated or claimed security screening applications, are at various stages of research, development and testing. Some are designed to perform the same functions as existing equipment but to a higher standard; some are intended to perform screening functions beyond the capacity of current equipment; and some offer the prospect of integrating two or more screening functions in a single item of equipment. In addition, technologies are now emerging which may have useful security applications in managing front of house risks at passenger terminals.

The Review suggests that before the ultimate goal of integrated screening portals is reached there will be an intermediate stage, at which next generation equipment is introduced but remains unintegrated. The delay before commencement of this intermediate stage is an important determinant of how future preventive security measures are shaped. The likely reality is that the basic elements of a screening point will change only incrementally in the immediate

future. It is expected that a radical redesign based on the advent of an integrated single portal is unlikely to become technically mature or commercially feasible for several years.

The Review recommends that the Australian Government continue to develop its technical capacity and knowledge in regard to screening technologies so that it is well-informed on when it might be appropriate to apply new generation technology in Australia.

To ensure that the screening methods, technology and techniques remain robust and relevant to the contemporary threats, the Review proposes a range of new additional layers of security to enhance the detection capability of aviation security screening. This would include investigating the feasibility of 'non-technology' measures such as explosives detection canines and the behaviour analysis of persons.

A key consideration of the Review has been the role of the screening officer in the achievement of security outcomes. A number of recommendations have been made in regard to the screener vocation. The Review concluded that the community does not adequately value the role of an aviation security screener. Screeners surveyed for the Review said they often suffer from both a lack of respect within the aviation industry and from conflicts with the travelling public. The Review supports any strategies for improving the public image and credibility of screeners by highlighting the critical and important nature of their work. A change of job title is being proposed to better reflect screeners' specialist role and assist in the changing of community perceptions towards the vocation. Furthermore, the Review supports the development of a national communication strategy to inform members of the travelling public about screening processes and requirements and to underscore the important role screeners play in ensuring aviation security. The Review also suggests there is merit in identifying strategies to improve the overall job satisfaction and retention of aviation security screeners, and contribute to the development of a screener career path.

The Review considers that a one-size-fits-all security approach is unsuitable for Australian aviation in achieving the required security outcomes. That is to say, due to variations in their size, capacity and location, airports have varied abilities to deliver nationally consistent security screening. Consistency of every process for every passenger would require all airport screening points to be configured identically and atmospheric conditions controlled across the country. This is not feasible. Nevertheless, appropriate targets and measures

of screening performance need to be identified and implemented in order to provide the ability to assess with, sufficient rigor, the degree to which screening is performed effectively, efficiently and consistently. Consistency of outcome (as distinct from process) is achievable through performance measurement designed to raise overall standards.

The Review examined the current performance measures utilised internationally and in Australia, the role of systems testing in demonstrating screening effectiveness, and the feasibility of adopting nationally consistent targets and measures.

The Review noted that under Australia's current structural model for delivery of screening, screening authorities operate under regulated transport security programs. However, the on-the-ground provision of security screening services is sub-contracted to screening providers where performance targets and measures are specified in commercial-in-confidence contracts with their screening authority. The Review recommends the establishment of nationally agreed and applied performance measures, through a performance management framework, designed to be more transparent and to ensure continuous improvement and to build best practice capacity.

Further, the Review recommends the introduction of an improved regime of covert and overt system testing of screening at Australian airports that comprehensively tests people, technology and processes for likely contemporary threats. This will contribute to a better understanding by the regulator and the aviation industry of any capability gaps in the system and have a far higher educational value for those conducting screening. This approach will better equip the regulator to determine whether the security performance at screening points throughout Australia is improving or declining and identify any specific and systemic failings before potentially catastrophic or disruptive security breaches occur.

Concurrent to this work will be a program of research and development designed to gather and disseminate to the aviation industry a range of best practice guidance material on screening. It is also proposed to commence a bi-annual national aviation security screening conference.

Given the expected growth in passenger numbers, the challenge of reconciling effective security with timely passenger facilitation is likely to become more acute. While the growth of air transport services is likely to be tempered by the global financial crisis in

the short term, we expect the aviation sector to continue to grow. Increasing passenger numbers will place greater pressure on existing airport infrastructure and result in demands for more streamlined security screening procedures and better designed security screening facilities.

Aviation activity has grown strongly over recent years in regional Australia. The number of screened air services originating from regional airports has risen significantly with the growth of jet services servicing the resources community. Equally, the proliferation of regional jets is introducing scheduled passenger jet services to many regional communities for the first time. Security screening is now being required at these airports and this has increased operating and capital costs. This is raising issues regarding the sustainability of aviation services in some parts of regional Australia. The Review has noted the importance of aviation to economic development in the regions and access to remote areas. Given the emerging spread in the nature of screened airports, the Review recommends that where changes are to be proposed to the security measures to be employed, that the regulator: advise industry why a change is required; analyse the likely impacts, including costs; ensure adequate consultation occurs prior to decisions being made; and provide targeted support where appropriate.

Ensuring the smooth and efficient movement of passengers through screening points is important for facilitation reasons but even more so for security reasons. Queues at screening points create easy targets, firstly because of the mass gathering, and secondly because they exist in a less secure zone that is easier to access than sterile areas or aircraft. Congestion can undermine the integrity of the screening process as a result of the pressure placed on screeners to process passengers faster. It can create greater anxiety and stress amongst passengers that may lead to a greater incidence of distracting conflicts between screeners and the travelling public.

A range of factors influences the ability of a person to navigate the passenger screening process on any given day at any given airport in a timely manner; for example, the number of screening lanes available to cope with passenger demand, particularly during busy periods, will influence dwell and processing times. A major cause of delay and queuing at screening points in Australia is a lack of knowledge or preparation for screening by passengers. There is also public disquiet and increased potential for conflict with screeners as a result of the measures designed to prevent a range of prohibited

items being taken onto an aircraft. The limits on liquids, aerosols and gels being carried onto international flights is a topical example.

The Review recommends that a national communication campaign be prepared targeting passenger preparedness for screening and complaints handling. While there will be aspects that inform passengers at the screening point, the main focus of the campaign would be to ensure passengers are prepared before they arrive at the airport and therefore avoid unnecessary complications and facilitation delays. An additional focus will be on ensuring the preparedness of members of the travelling public requiring greater assistance at security screening points, such as people with disabilities and elderly passengers.

The Review has canvassed a number of views expressed in public submissions on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the existing decentralised framework for delivery of screening services in Australia. The Review recommends further analysis in this area.