



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Infrastructure and
Communications Inquiry report:**

***Finding the Right Balance: Cabin Crew
Ratios on Australian Aircraft***

March 2017

Introduction

On 21 November 2011, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications (the Committee) tabled its report on the inquiry into the ratio of cabin crew members to passenger seats on Australian aircraft.

The inquiry was conducted following a request from the then Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, with the Committee considering:

- the current aviation safety regulatory system for aircraft operators in relation to the application of the cabin crew to passenger ratio including current exemption provisions;
- the role of cabin crew in managing both passenger safety and security;
- the factors that determine the cabin crew to passenger ratio;
- domestic and international practice in respect of cabin crew to passenger ratios; and
- measures to enhance aviation safety that may be considered in future requirements on aircraft operators for a safety risk management plan covering the cabin crew to passenger ratio.

The Australian Government thanks the Committee for its examination of these matters and the recommendations it has presented for consideration.

Response to Committee recommendations

The Australian Government recognises the importance of having knowledgeable and well-trained cabin crew professionals on Australian domestic aircraft. Cabin crew are responsible for passenger management including pre-flight briefings, security and safety awareness in-flight, emergency evacuation procedures, and communication and coordination with, and on behalf of, the flight crew.

Therefore, in preparing its response to the Committee's recommendations the Government has taken advice from the independent aviation safety regulator, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), and the aviation security regulator, the Office of Transport Security (OTS), on the core issue raised in the report, i.e. whether a move to more permanently establish a one cabin crew member to every fifty passenger seat ratio for Australian domestic aircraft operations does not reduce aviation safety or security in Australia.

Both CASA and OTS have advised that there are no safety or security related concerns regarding the ratio of one cabin crew member to every fifty passenger seats. This practice, which has been operating in Australia since 2006 without any adverse impact on safety or security, provides for the more efficient and lower cost operation of our domestic aviation industry, benefitting our airlines and the travelling public. It is also a practice adopted extensively overseas.

Both CASA and OTS have confirmed that aircraft operators must demonstrate their compliance with their respective safety and security regulatory requirements for domestic aircraft operations, including passenger compartment security.

Compliance is demonstrated by an operator having in place a robust Safety Management System (SMS), which includes a Safety Risk Management Plan (SRMP) approved by CASA and detailed operational procedures in their Operations Manual, together with a Transport Security Program (TSP) approved by OTS, including the relevant provisions covering the important role of the cabin crew.

Airline industry compliance with their SMS, SRMP and operations manual is subject to regular monitoring and auditing by CASA, while OTS will similarly monitor and audit airline compliance with approved TSPs.

The Government's response to each of the Committee's seven recommendations is attached.

Recommendation 1

That the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the Office of Transport Security work together to determine an appropriate level of passenger compartment security for Australian domestic flights, taking into account previous incidents both in Australia and abroad.

Response

The Government **notes** the Committee's recommendation.

As the Australian Government's preventive security regulator of the Australian transport industry and primary adviser on transport security, OTS works with the states and territories, other government agencies including CASA, international governments and bodies and industry to improve security and prevent transport security incidents.

Under these arrangements, OTS administers a comprehensive and strong aviation security system that has proven to be effective in protecting travellers, aviation infrastructure and assets and the general public.

Passenger compartment security is addressed through an aircraft operator's TSP, approved by OTS, which includes:

- measures and procedures for handling suspect behaviour by a passenger;
- in the event of a heightened security alert, procedures for raising the awareness and alertness of staff to security threats and their responsibility to report aviation security incidents and breaches;
- knowledge, skills, training and qualifications of personnel with particular security roles; and
- confirmation that security awareness training is given to relevant staff.

Australia meets its international obligations under Annex 6 and Annex 17 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention) through the requirements of the *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004* and its regulations, including the provision of flight and cabin crew security training.

OTS and CASA have established mechanisms for ensuring that policy and regulatory frameworks reflect the Government's safety and security outcomes. This includes through regular high level meetings, operational liaison, and consultative fora.

Recommendation 2

That the Civil Aviation Safety Authority consider passenger compartment security in any future review of cabin crew ratios.

Response

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

It is OTS and not CASA that is responsible for establishing the appropriate measures that need to be taken by aircraft operators in ensuring passenger compartment security.

As indicated in the response to Recommendation 1, these matters are addressed through the aircraft operator's TSP, including security awareness training for operational staff.

CASA is responsible for establishing the appropriate measures that need to be taken by aircraft operators in ensuring passenger compartment safety, including cabin crew ratios. CASA will consult with OTS to ensure any potential security matters are considered and appropriately addressed as part of any future review of cabin crew ratios.

Recommendation 3

That, prior to finalising the process, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority publish on its website all non-confidential submissions made to it through the Notice of Proposed Rule Making process.

Response

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The recommendation aligns with CASA's formal public consultation arrangements for the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) process. This includes the public release of documents via website, email, consultative fora, and CASA's online publication 'Flight Safety Australia'.

A summary covering all submissions is published at the final stages of the NPRM process on the CASA website.

Recommendation 4

That the Civil Aviation Safety Authority advertise Notices of Proposed Rule Making that directly affect passengers in publications that are widely read by the travelling public, such as in-flight magazines, and that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority seek submissions from the public into the advertised Notices of Proposed Rule Making.

Response

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

As indicated in the response to Recommendation 3, CASA has in place formal public consultation arrangements for the NPRM process.

CASA notes that due to the technical nature, and in some cases length, of an NPRM, it does not consider publications such as in-flight magazines to be an appropriate medium for public consultation.

However, CASA will be utilising various forms of communication to alert the travelling public to the publication of NPRMs on the CASA website, including through social media and the CASA Briefing electronic newsletter.

Recommendation 5

That the Civil Aviation Safety Authority ensure that Australia becomes compliant with the International Civil Aviation Organization's Standards and Recommended Practices (ICAO SARPs) relating to cabin crew flight and duty time limitations as a matter of priority.

Response

The Government **supports this recommendation in-principle.**

CASA has acted on ICAO advice in relation to fatigue management and has been running a standards development project relating to fatigue management for aviation personnel, with phase one of the project relating to flight crew and phase two considering cabin crew fatigue management.

The standards development project has been undertaken in phases in order to give highest priority to the implications of fatigue risk in flight crew members (FCMs).

Phase two of the fatigue project relates to fatigue management for cabin crew members. A Working Group was formed in May 2013 comprising a range of stakeholders (including representatives from cabin crew organisations). The findings of the Working Group will contribute to a range of rule changes, including the development of the proposed new CASA standard for fatigue management for cabin crew members.

Phase two of the fatigue project is currently on hold pending completion of a review of fatigue management arrangements for flight crew. CASA will conduct a thorough assessment of fatigue issues as they relate to cabin crew before assessing regulatory options and related business compliance costs. CASA will release a regulatory proposal on cabin crew fatigue management for consultation before any changes to rules are made.

Recommendation 6

That the Civil Aviation Safety Authority cease providing new exemptions to the 1:36 cabin crew ratio currently mandated by Civil Aviation Order 20.16.3, and that all exemptions to the Order currently in place not be renewed upon expiry.

Response

The Government **does not support** this recommendation.

CASA has previously advised the Committee that it would continue to re-issue directions altering the operation of CAO 20.16.3 pending finalisation of the Government's response to the Committee's report.

CASA has confirmed that any renewal of these instruments is taken with full regard to the safety of air navigation as the most important consideration.

Aircraft operators with current individual directions must continue to demonstrate to CASA an appropriate level of safety risk management capability, performance and compliance using the 1:50 ratio. This forms part of an approved and audited safety risk management plan.

Recommendation 7

That the 1:36 ratio be retained until such a time that it can be demonstrated that a change to a 1:50 cabin crew ratio in Australia will not result in reduced levels of safety or security.

Response

The Government **does not support** this recommendation.

The unequivocal advice from both CASA and OTS is that having a one cabin crew member to every fifty passenger seats ratio in Australia does not reduce the safety or security of domestic aircraft operations.

CASA advises that since 2006, when the 1:50 cabin crew ratio was first permitted on some Australian aircraft, Australia has maintained a high level of safety. Most of the major international safety regulatory authorities around the world endorse the 1:50 ratio. Accordingly, CASA generally only issues individual directions permitting a 1:50 ratio if the aircraft has been certificated by the state of design for such a ratio.

CASA has also confirmed that airlines need to have in place a robust safety management system and safety risk management plan, approved by CASA, to have access to the 1:50 cabin crew ratio on specified aircraft.

Airline compliance with their safety management systems and safety risk management plans will be the subject of regular monitoring and auditing by CASA. This will include the close assessment and monitoring of those airlines who operate aircraft that use the 1:50 ratio.

Similarly, OTS has also confirmed that since the use of a 1:50 cabin crew ratio in Australia was permitted on some Australian aircraft in 2006, there has not been a diminution of security standards in Australia.

Under the *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004*, and its regulations, including the requirement for an aircraft operator to have an approved transport security programme, OTS is satisfied the arrangements for passenger compartment security are fully met.

OTS will monitor and audit airline compliance with approved airline transport security programmes, including the relevant provisions relating to security awareness training given to operational staff, for airlines approved by CASA for operations under the 1:50 cabin crew ratio.