

ATSB – Aviation White Paper

Introduction

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the terms of reference and provide some relevant background about the ATSB. The ATSB is prepared to support the development of the Aviation White Paper, recognising the Commonwealth Government's interests in relation to aviation safety, competitiveness, sustainability, and efficiency out to 2050.

The ATSB understands that its role as an accident and incident investigator and analyst of safety data can make a contribution to a number of the terms of reference. A rapidly changing transport environment, with new technologies and new processes will provide opportunities to enhance safety. However, change can introduce new risks. Investigations of incidents as well as accidents provides assurance that lessons are learnt to prevent future accidents.

About the ATSB

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is an independent statutory agency of the Australian Government.

The ATSB's purpose is defined by its mission statement:

We improve transport safety for the greatest public benefit through our independent investigations and influencing safety action.

The ATSB's functions under the [Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003](#) (TSI Act) is to improve transport safety aviation, marine and rail industries. The ATSB does this through:

- the independent investigation of transport accidents and other safety occurrences
- safety data recording, analysis, and research
- fostering safety awareness, knowledge, and action.

The TSI Act makes it clear that, in carrying out its purpose, the ATSB cannot apportion blame, assist in determining liability or, as a general rule, assist in court proceedings. Its sole focus remains the prevention of future accidents and the improvement of safety.

Public Benefit

When we perform our functions, we do so for the public benefit. We focus on the public interest where the safety of passengers and workers on an aircraft, train or ship is concerned. Our job is to influence safety action that prevents deaths and serious injuries.

Our agency is also focused on the public interest when it comes to the significant costs that can result from an accident, particularly where there is damage to public infrastructure or an impact on the national economy where supply chains are affected. The cost of transport accidents is often significant.

Aviation jurisdiction

The ATSB receives 6,000 to 7,000 aviation occurrences each year, of which only around 60 are investigated with the ATSB's resources. Generally, the ATSB focusses its investigations on operations where there are fare paying passengers, as represented by the table below.

	Operation type	Number of investigations for 2022	Yearly average (2019-2022)
1	Scheduled commercial air transport	18	18.6
2	Non-scheduled commercial air transport	14	11.6
3	Aerial work	12	8
4	Instructional flying	4	4.6
5	Sport and pleasure flying	8	7.6
6	Own business travel	0	0.2
	Other General Aviation	4	4.2
	Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems	0	0.8
	Total	60	55.6

Safety action

The aviation, marine and rail investigations published in 2021-22 identified no fewer than 56 issues – factors that if unaddressed have the potential to adversely affect the safety of future operations. Examples of investigations involving safety action in the aviation industry in response to identified safety issues include:

- [AO-2019-073](#): The evacuation of an A330 passenger aircraft at Sydney Airport, New South Wales, on 15 December 2019 – our investigation highlighted the importance of clear passenger information and commands, and resulted in the airline amending its safety material, cabin crew training, and other procedures as a result of the incident.
- [AO-2020-012](#): The mid-air collision of 2 twin-engine training aircraft near Mangalore Airport, Victoria, on 19 February 2020, fatally injuring four pilots. The accident was the first mid-air collision in Australia between 2 civilian aircraft operating under instrument flight rules procedures that have been in place for many decades, and our investigation highlighted the potential for 'ADS-B IN' technology to improve pilots' situational awareness in non-controlled airspace.

Resource for the inquiry

The ATSB produces a number of research and statistical publications, and maintains databases, that may be useful resources for the team developing the white paper. All of these materials are available on the ATSB website at www.atsb.gov.au. Further, ATSB staff can make themselves available to assist the White paper team directly.