



Australian Government
Civil Aviation Safety Authority

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF AVIATION SAFETY

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30 November 2012

Senator Bill Heffernan
Chair
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs
and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Heffernan

**Inquiry into Aviation Accident Investigations (Pel-Air)
Hearing of 21 November 2012**

I write in response to certain comments made during the Committee's hearing on 21 November 2012 about remarks made by the Director of Aviation Safety, Mr John McCormick, as these appeared in the Director's regular column (*Director's Desk*) in the 8 November 2012 edition of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority's (CASA's) weekly internal staff newsletter.

I am concerned that some members of the Committee, amongst others, may have formed a view that the Director's comments were in some way critical of the Committee and its proceedings. That is not the case. Rather, when the Director's remarks are read in the context in which they appeared, it will be readily apparent that Mr McCormick understands, respects, appreciates and is entirely supportive of, the Committee's vitally important role and function.

To put the matter beyond doubt, the relevant section of the Director's column is reproduced below in full.

We recently appeared at a sitting of the *Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference's Committee* Inquiry into the 'PEL-AIR' ditching report and 'other matters'. I wish to pass on my personal thanks for the outstanding effort everyone made to meet the requests of the Senate Committee inquiring into the PEL-AIR ditching report. I fully appreciate the time and effort that was required and on behalf of everyone else at CASA, thank you and well done! That sort of spirit is very humbling to me.

As for these Inquiries themselves, they are an important part of Westminster Democracy in this country and, as such, are not events to be feared or avoided. I personally welcome the opportunity to present CASA's positions at any venue.

However, do not be dismayed by our vocal but largely uninformed minority of critics; they are symptomatic of other ills in society. I prefer 'facts' when engaged in discussions; not hearsay and tautological rubbish that some others seem to regard as promising material.

I look forward to assisting the Committee conclude its investigations. At the completion of this Inquiry there is a report produced. That report becomes a 'Report of Parliament' and will be forwarded, by established process, to the Minister for his consideration.

I am concerned, too, that the Director's comments about what he clearly identified as a small minority of CASA's critics might have been perceived as directed towards anyone participating in, or contributing to, the Committee's Inquiry, or towards CASA's critics more generally. They were not.

Rather, as he did in his remarks before the Committee (in estimates) in 2009,^{*} Mr McCormick was referring in this instance to those few individuals who seem to take any opportunity, including the opportunity to which the publicity generated by the Committee's Inquiry has given rise, to unfairly denigrate the integrity of CASA—and more specifically, individual CASA executives and officers—often in 'on-line' blogs, and almost invariably behind a convenient veil of anonymity.

As the Director has said previously, CASA embraces its accountability obligations, and welcomes criticism of any kind, when it is fair, reasonable, constructive and civil. Criticism that is ill-informed, malign and unfair, however, especially when it is directed at individuals within the organisation, can have a corrosively detrimental effect on staff morale. The Director's column, which is aimed at CASA employees, was intended to help counter the adverse effects just such markedly unhelpful criticism can have on CASA staff.

I would appreciate it if you could make this letter available to members of the Committee, and would welcome its publication on the Committee website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Aleck
Acting Director of Aviation Safety

^{*} *Hansard*, Tuesday, 20 October 2009, pp. 201-202.