

Shameful heel-dragging on air incident probes



Mike O'Connor November 30, 2017 11:00pm

- **AS tens of thousands of Australians prepare to head to the airport for the great Christmas holiday migration, they might care to ponder the following.**

In the skies over the Gold Coast on July 21 last year, an arriving Jetstar A320 and a departing AirAsia X A330, with a combined seating capacity of 520 passengers, came frighteningly close to flying into each other.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau says the jets came as close as 183m vertically and 630m laterally when regulations stipulate the separation should be 305m and 6km respectively.

The ATSB said the results of its investigation into this would be made public in July this year. This has not happened.

According to the ATSB website, completion of the draft investigation report into the incident “has been delayed by the involvement of the investigator in charge on other aviation safety investigations and tasks”. It says a final report is anticipated to be released to the public in May 2018, almost two years after the event.

In February this year, four American tourists and their pilot were killed when their aircraft crashed soon after takeoff from Melbourne’s Essendon Airport.

It was later revealed that the pilot was being investigated over a near collision at Mount Hotham on September 3, 2015.



Essendon DFO shopping centre in Melbourne following the crash of a light plane. (Pic: Jason Edwards)

The completion of this investigation has been delayed three times due to competing priorities and workload of the investigator in charge.

In July it was promised by October. It still has not been released.

According to the ATSB, “the draft report has been finalised and is currently undergoing an internal review process

prior to approval by the ATSB Commission”.

It begs the question that if the investigation had been carried more quickly, would that pilot have been at the controls at Essendon and would the Americans still be alive?

Just over two years ago, three people died in a helicopter crash in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales. Among the victims was pilot Richard Green, who had a history of close calls.

He had lost his licence for six months in 2013 after being involved in four dangerous flying incidents in 11 days in May 2012.

Six months later he was in trouble again when his helicopter struck power lines.

Following the Hunter Valley tragedy, the ATSB said it would complete its investigation in a year. Two years on, Felicity Davis, whose husband John died in the crash, is still waiting for the report.

Only a third of ATSB investigations are completed within 12 months.



Dick Smith has called the ATSB “secretive” and “insecure”. (Pic: Dylan Coker)

Dick Smith, a former chairman of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, has described the ATSB as “secretive, insecure, and inclined to protect its own interests and those of companies and government instrumentalities rather than serving the public and individuals”.

“They are basically a secret, secret organisation,” he said this week.

It is screamingly obvious that there needs to be a public inquiry into the workings of the ATSB.

Business as usual, with inquiries into incidents that involve the safety of passengers dragging on for two years, is no longer acceptable.

The aim, surely, is to discover the reason for accidents or “near misses” as quickly as possible and prevent them happening again.

The system appears to be broken. The public deserves a better deal.

Extracted from:

www.couriermail.com.au/rendezview/...on.../ec5b72211b47ec355461517eae2bad85

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