



Australian Government
Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Chief Commissioner

Contact: *Greg Hood*

2018

Independent Review of the APS
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) to participate in the review of the Australian Public Service (APS) through this submission/case study.

As we discussed at the recent APSC-hosted forum for small agencies, I consider it important that we, as a small agency serving the Australian Government and people, provide a contemporary perspective to the review in relation to the manner in which we are evolving our business model and practices.

In facilitating this commitment, I would like to suggest that relevant panel members might wish to participate in the opportunity for an “experiential” visit to a small agency such as ours. In our case, this would be a timely venture as we are currently undergoing an efficiency audit by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). In preparing for this audit, we have taken the time to reflect on our past, present and future state in terms of achieving our primary function to improve transport safety with priority given to delivering the best safety outcomes for the travelling public.

As a backdrop and potentially an agenda for the visit, during the past two years, the ATSB has embarked on an “evolution” program that has resulted in fundamental changes to the way in which we operate.

Environment

The ATSB faces an operating environment of continuing growth in, and progressive changes to, the composition of the aviation, rail and marine transport sectors (e.g. air traffic movement numbers are predicted to double by 2030, automated rail is already a reality, and the cruise and cargo ship industries are experiencing unprecedented growth).

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In contrast, the ATSB (up until the last financial year) had continued to experience successive reductions to its base appropriations reflective of the efficiency dividend and other whole of government savings initiatives. To manage these fiscal circumstances, the ATSB was required to reduce its core staffing profile, including specialist investigators, by approximately 25 per cent from when it was established as an independent statutory authority in July 2009.

Through the Government's 2017–18 Budget measure 'improving transport safety', the ATSB has been able to replenish its workforce and re-profile its capital investment strategies to meet its projected needs in essential technical equipment, data warehousing requirements and core enterprise systems. That acknowledged, this scenario has significantly impacted on the agency's capability to achieve its prescribed deliverables and key performance indicators. With the steady reduction in resources, the ATSB was not able to keep pace with demand and at the start of the 2017–18 financial year; the ATSB had a backlog of around 60 complex transport safety investigations that had exceeded either their scheduled time or their allocated investigation days.

Given it takes approximately 12-18 months to develop the base competencies for a new transport safety investigator, it may take a considerable period before the agency has a sufficient capability base to meet existing and projected demand. To mitigate this scenario from reoccurring in the future, a more robust funding model for safety focused (or public good) agencies like the ATSB may be within scope of the review.

Efficiency

Rather than continue a single modal approach to transport safety investigations, in 2017 the ATSB underwent a major structural change, adopting a multi-modal, teams-based approach to our work enabling a more efficient use of resources. This approach has also allowed us to reduce the number of Senior Executive Service employees from four (4) to two (2). The ATSB is also adopting a more rigorous program managed approach to the quality and timeliness of the production of our investigation reports, engaging a Program Director and further refinement of our processes.

Recruitment

Rather than persevere with the traditional recruitment process, where transport safety investigators were recruited for their domain skills (i.e. pilots, air traffic controllers, engineers, ships captains, train drivers etc.), the ATSB mapped the broader competencies of an investigator, and worked with a specialist recruitment provider on a methodology to test and validate these competencies. This new approach has yielded positive results with 17 new transport safety investigators successfully on-boarded over the past six months.

Communications

The ATSB has significantly increased its outreach with transport safety messages, through an enhanced communication strategy. This involves the development of a strategic communications plan, greater use of social media (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), and the construction of a video and audio studio where releases for the media on investigations-of-interest are prepared and then dispatched.

Continual Learning

Recognizing the ATSB is a small operational agency, and that there were prohibitive overheads to maintaining its status of being a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), a two-tiered strategy was adopted to ensure that our staff were afforded the opportunity to continue their training towards a tertiary qualification. The first tier (interim arrangement) was to partner with an accredited RTO, and the second component was to release a limited request for tender (RFT) to market to identify a longer term tertiary partner to accommodate and ensure our specialist learning and development needs are met, but also to expand our transport safety research capabilities.

Diversity

Transport in general, and transport safety in particular, has long been the subject of a gender imbalance. The ATSB has implemented strategies to increase the ratio of women in the workforce to almost 40 per cent (from 25 per cent), and concurrently has expanded its diversity through the engagement of Indigenous Australians and persons that identify as LGBTI.

Innovation

The ATSB has encouraged innovation through empowerment. Two major achievements have been the introduction of a fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones to assist in accident site mapping (including authorization from the regulator and the training of seven drone pilots), and the introduction of Skype for Business enabling better inter-unit communication and live video back to Canberra of accident sites. The ATSB has come a long way in terms of embracing technology that will provide greater agility and efficiency in support of our operations.

Strategic Focus

The ATSB is well advanced in the development of a Vision 2025 (anticipated publication in October 2018). This vision document will serve as a future-oriented declaration of the ATSB's purpose and aspirations.

The vision will guide strategy development, help communicate the ATSB's purpose to all stakeholders to ensure a common understanding, and inform the goals and objectives set to determine whether the strategy is on track.

The objective of the ATSB's vision statement is to ensure that the ATSB works towards enhancing the contribution it makes to transport safety in the context of the operating environment expected to exist in 2025. This vision statement will guide our future annual and corporate plans and may influence the Government's expectations particularly around our expanding jurisdictions.

The primary goals and strategies that align with key themes of the APS review include:

- **Evolving our role as Australia's National Transport Safety Investigator** - through expanding our jurisdiction to cover Domestic Commercial Vessels and potentially the Heavy Vehicle

sector. Reinforcing our jurisdictions in Aviation and Rail. Preparing for increased space activity and greater collaboration with Defence.

- **Remaining a recognised world leader** - through marshalling the best expertise, building capability both in-house and within industry, creating a more agile workforce, greater engagement with our peers and benchmarking our performance on a global level.
- **Identify important safety issues that others don't** - through focussing on transport safety investigations that will most benefit from the ATSB's independent and systemic approach, using data and trend analysis to identify where critical safety issues are likely to exist and program manage and prioritise resources for investigations where there are the greatest safety improvements.
- **Predicting future safety risks** – through moving towards predictive safety management nationally and internationally, facilitate the sharing of safety information and data within industry and between transport modes, and ensuring the ATSB has the skills to meet the rapid changes in emerging technologies - particularly the automation of transport vehicles.
- **Become a motivating force for safety action that stops accidents** – through building stronger stakeholder networks (advocates), ensuring those who are best placed to take safety action have the information they need through improvements to our communication platforms and products, with a focus on digital enhancements (multi-media reports etc).

While the ATSB has work to complete in terms of ensuring the underlying enablers for these goals and strategies align with relevant government/industry agendas and initiatives, the ATSB is well placed to make sure it remains a contemporary and world leading transport safety investigation agency.

Consistent with an ethos of continual improvement, the ATSB continues to strive to best meet the needs of the Australian Government and people.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this submission/case study to the review and if practicable, I look forward to hosting relevant panel representatives in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Hood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Hood
Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer