

Safety panel no place for rage: David Forsyth (Australia)



INDUSTRY players making submissions to the federal government's review on aviation safety regulation need to leave the vitriol at home and respond constructively, panel chairman David Forsyth warns.

In an exclusive interview with *The Australian*, Mr Forsyth also advised people to be patient about airing their views during the next five months of the inquiry.

Submissions open today and the panel is expecting a similar number to the roughly 300 made to Labor's aviation white paper.

Mr Forsyth and fellow panel members Roger Whitefield and Don Spruston have been poring over previous reports on the industry and will kick off the investigations in Australia next week when they visit major airlines and general aviation airports in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

But the chairman emphasised this would be just the start to a long process that would take shape with a visiting program once submissions had closed on January 31.

"We will get to other people and particularly we encourage people to put submissions in," Mr Forsyth said. "The better their submissions, the more likely we're going to be talking to them at some point and expand on what they've put in their submissions.

"The submissions are important, and I think February and March and possibly some of April we're going to be pretty busy talking to people."

Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss announced the review last

month as a systematic and strategic examination of how well Australia's regulatory system was positioned globally.

Mr Truss said yesterday the aim was to make sure Australia remained at the forefront of aviation safety. "The general and regional aviation sectors, in particular, have told the government they are concerned about the costs of regulatory compliance and how our regulatory system compares to other countries.

"This review will place us in a strong position to ensure our aviation safety standards remain up to the challenge of meeting the predicted expansion of aviation over the next 20 years."

The committee on Monday and Tuesday will visit Canberra to meet departmental officials as well as those from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Airservices Australia.

They will be in Sydney on Wednesday, Adelaide on Thursday and Melbourne on Friday, when they will meet operators as well as visit Bankstown, Parafield and Moorabbin airports.

Mr Forsyth said the committee would aim to finish a draft report by the end of April so it could submit the final document to Mr Truss before the end of May.

"That's our timeframe and at this stage, although it's early days, we're hopeful of sticking to it."

He said the panel was open to anything industry players wanted to tell it; however, Mr Truss had been clear in the terms of reference that he wanted a strategic review that did not re-examine investigations or look at individual complaints.

The investigation would be in three major parts. "The first bit is the relationship between the agencies, which (Russell) Miller had a look at in 2007, and clearly there are still some questions surrounding the relationship, particularly between CASA and the ATSB," Mr Forsyth said.

"So we'll be having a bit of a look at that.

"The second part, which is a fair bit of work, I think, is to look at the regulatory reform program.

"We've already had a few people give us some interesting leads about how that could be improved, so we're going to be looking at

that fairly early in the piece.

"There's lots of things: the way the regs are put together, the way they're written and the issue of why it takes a long time in the consultation program and so forth.

"And that regulatory review thing has been going on for 20 years; it's a bit of a saga.

"The third main plank is CASA's audit and surveillance program of industry. And that and the second piece is where a lot of the vitriol is."

He said he understood some smaller operators were particularly cranky about the way CASA operated, but that the panel was not a witch-hunt and he would be seeking CASA's viewpoint.

"As with all of these things there's never any one fault," he said. "When you've got a relationship breakdown it takes at least two and sometimes three, so it will be interesting to hear both sides of it."

Admitting that managing the review would need "a fair bit of diplomacy", he said people would need to recognise that the panel was attempting to try and improve the situation. Being vitriolic about CASA or other players was not going to be seen as being particularly helpful.

"The panel obviously wants to get to the meat of these things and deal with it and maybe look at some options for improvement," he said "It isn't here to sit down to hear people rant and rave so people need to be measured in the way they put their responses together."

Commenting on his high-powered panel, the Qantas engineering veteran, chair of Safeski's Australia and former Airservices chair said his fellow panellists would be available to provide valuable insights into the Australian industry.

Mr Spruston is a former director-general of civil aviation at Transport Canada as well as an ex-director general of the International Business Aviation Council. Mr Whitefield is a former head of safety at British Airways, a former UK Civil Aviation Authority board member and was a safety advisor to Qantas.

Both men are pilots.

"I think it should be a good panel," Mr Forsyth said. "I've spoken to them both on the phone a few times and they're both very

knowledgeable guys and will be able to give us that litmus test or benchmarking, if you want to call it that, of the regulatory situation here and the agency situation here coppered to at least two other jurisdictions. So I think that will be very helpful."

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Submissions can be made through the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development website: infrastructure.gov.au/aviation/asrr

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/safety-panel-no-place-for-rage-david-forsyth/story-e6frg95x-1226776455520#>