

**Speech by**  
**Airservices Australia Chair**  
**Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC**  
**(Ret'd)**

**to the**

**RAAA 2015 National Convention**

**Hunter Valley**  
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***NOT CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY***

Good morning everyone.

I'm delighted to be here to present the opening address at this year's Regional Aviation Association of Australia National Convention.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet today, and pay respect to their elders, past and present.

This convention is about collaboration, sharing experiences and sharing ideas. By working together we will be able to realise the benefits for all of our organisations.

I know Airservices has a long and constructive relationship with the RAAA and its members. I would like to emphasise the value that we place on that relationship.

Like any engagement between two aviation organisations there can be occasions when we each hold different views however, it is true to say that the maturity of our relationship means we always have constructive conversations with a shared purpose that lead to agreed outcomes.

I have always been very proud to have been closely involved with Australian aviation throughout my career, confident we were among the safest in the world.

Many air travellers have told me over the years that they prefer not to think about what goes on behind the scenes when they are flying—they just want to know that it's managed safely.

Major incidents are rare and aviation remains the safest way to travel, both within Australia and around the world. However, in the aftermath of two international incidents which tragically took the life of 34 Australians last year, more and more people have asked me, "Is it safe to fly?"

It's a natural response and those of us who work in aviation have a duty to ask that question after any incident and ensure that our systems are as safe as they can be.

Of course, the goal of any safety system is to act before there is an incident and that's enshrined in the way we manage aviation safety in Australia.

I've spent my life trying to improve the safety of aviation and I have seen the cost of air tragedies. It is a cost that applies both at a personal level as well as on a national scale. I have spoken with many of the families of the MH370 and MH17 incidents and I take the responsibility of relentlessly pursuing answers and justice for them seriously.

It is these longer term and newer experiences that allow me to share with you what gives me confidence that our systems are working as they should, that we continue to transform and improve our organisation and that we are moving forward to create a better, safer system.

Since my first solo flight in 1964, I've had the privilege of flying as part of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) throughout Australia, in the United States, in our region and around the world.

I flew for three years as a search and rescue pilot in the US and deployed to Papua New Guinea for periods up to eight weeks on twelve occasions.

(Personal anecdotes about flying in LHI and the 1974 floods at Walgett)

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- maintained a posture - respond to any emergency evacuation.
- night ops to LHI always challenging
- flying C130H – airstrip <3000 feet – high terrain – variable weather

1974 floods

- Walgett roof top rescues
- One skid on levy bank
- Broken Hill - RFDS

I have flown professionally and for pleasure, arriving and departing from bush airstrips, regional aerodromes and international airports throughout Australia.

The transformation in technology, in airports, aircraft and safety has been extraordinary over my career and it continues today.

At Airservices we continue on this transformational journey and it is shaping the way we operate.

The transition involves:

- moving extensively from ground radar surveillance to global navigation satellite systems
- shared access to common flight data
- moving incrementally from voice to digital data where practicable
- moving from traditional airspace control to four dimension predictive technologies
- moving from paper strips in the tower to digital touch screens
- more flexible use of airspace
- using the en route airspace more efficiently by using environmentally-friendly preferred routes
- collaborative information-based services, and
- OneSKY.

Through this journey, we will all benefit from the more efficient use of airspace – a more sustainable industry – technological innovation and investment – and from making a safe system even safer.

There are a number of things that give me confidence in our air safety.

The first is our track record. Australia's air traffic management has consistently been in the top three globally, in terms of safety, for more than a decade. Our major airlines have an enviable safety record.

Australians have always been leaders and innovators in aviation safety, including the development of escape slides that double as life-rafts and the invention of the black-box flight recorder.

Finding MH370 remains a priority in the search that Australia leads, to not only help explain what happened, but to ensure it can never happen again.

A more recent innovation came with my announcement in January of a new trial to more closely track flights over the open oceans.

Airservices, saw the opportunity to adapt ADS-C satellite technology that was already installed on most commercial aircraft for air traffic control, and use it to monitor flights in oceanic areas.

In partnership with Qantas, Virgin Australia and global satellite provider, Inmarsat, this technology is now being used to more closely track flights that Airservices manages every day.

Our air navigation partners in other countries including Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States have followed Australia's lead and now use the same technology for closer aircraft tracking over the oceans.

This initiative has the potential to dramatically reduce search and rescue areas, in cases like the MH370 search, and provide early warnings that will allow a more immediate response if something goes wrong.

The second reason for my confidence is that we have a comprehensive and robust aviation safety framework in this country that works in an orderly way. While far from glamorous,

the governance, transparency and regulatory approach to aviation in Australia is fundamental to our industry.

Successive governments have over decades adopted a strong policy and legislative framework to air traffic management and safety, recognising its importance to Australia's economy and security.

CASA is the regulator responsible for the rules and regulations that set the minimum standards for equipment, training, and operating procedures in the air and on the ground.

As you know Airservices delivers services to the standards required by the government and CASA in the provision of air traffic control and aviation fire and rescue.

I know that for many of you, the establishment of services at regional aerodromes is front of mind. We are working closely with the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development on the regulatory policy review of aviation fire services announced in the Government's response to the Aviation Safety Regulation Review Report and I know our

acting CEO Jason Harfield will have more to say about that tomorrow.

Suffice to say Airservices looks forward to the review outcome and recommendations that follow.

The third reason is that aviation is a global industry, and consistent standards ensure that our own airlines, and those that fly to Australia, can operate safely and efficiently as they cross international borders.

A flight from Sydney to London can cross the airspace of up to 30 different countries. We have air services arrangements with 90 countries and we play a major role in the United Nation's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) that sets global standards.

We share the best of Australian innovation and technical expertise, but bring home the best from what we see around the world.

Our safety record, and our service performance, is no accident.

Australia has evolved its own aviation safety framework and systems based on our unique needs. Our aviation environment is one with great contrasts.

We have some of the busiest air routes in the world. Sydney-Melbourne, for example, currently ranks third globally. In contrast, some of our most isolated communities depend on aviation services for food, medical and essential services.

Australia has a unique demographic with a relatively small and dispersed population. Air transport, whether passenger or freight, is vital in connecting communities and in contributing to our national transport infrastructure. This association and its hard working members are a vital link in delivering essential services across the country 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Our approach to air safety is therefore not a one-size-fits-all. It is based on careful and risk-based assessment of needs. This includes the needs of different aircraft, of different airports, and of different stages of flight.

Each of Australia's airports is unique, and their air traffic management and safety procedures are determined on the

needs of their environment, traffic volumes and aircraft operators.

At Sydney airport, for example, we see around a thousand flights operate every day. In the peak periods, air traffic control manage a take-off or landing every 45 seconds. At somewhere like Hobart or Broome, we manage around 80 flights over the course of a day.

Regulations that guide air safety services both on the ground and in the air exist at all airports across Australia. For example, air traffic control towers are required at an airport once the number of aircraft movements and air traffic complexity reaches a specific level.

Procedures in regional airports are adapted to the environment and can be different from those used in Australian metropolitan airports, or even in the United States, but they are safe.

The Airservices Board and senior management team are cognisant that we must provide our services in a cost effective manner and so as to not disadvantage some of the industry—I

know that the costs of our services and how these impact your bottom line—are top of mind.

A further important safety net in the Australian aviation system is the rescue and fire fighting service that Airservices delivers to provide another layer of backup to our safety systems.

Fires can consume an aircraft quickly due to the amount of fuel and combustible material involved. For this reason, aviation rescue and fire services around the world meet an international standard that requires them to respond to incidents and reach any point on an airport in less than three minutes.

In the last financial year, Airservices aviation rescue fire fighters responded to around 500 call outs each month and saved 13 lives. Most of these related to routine incidents—fuel spills, burst tires or hot brakes —or medical responses involving heart attacks, strokes or falls in terminal buildings.

The final reason I am confident in our approach to aviation safety is that we have a clear plan to move forward in Australia.

Changes planned by our industry include advancements in satellite technology that is better, safer and more efficient, including the use of Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast, ADS-B which is delivering safety and efficiency benefits across the industry.

Airservices has invested in establishing more than 70 ADS-B ground stations around the country, with up to 15 additional ground stations being considered to further enhance our world leading ADS-B network.

I would like to acknowledge the role of the RAAA in helping shape the current policy framework and also mention a couple of your members - Alliance and Sharp Airlines who have been supporters and adopters of the technology.

The work goes on. Airservices has recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement with US based Aireon to assess how space-based Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast technology could potentially be used in the future.

We will work with Aireon to determine potential safety and efficiency benefits the technology may offer our customers.

Space-based ADS-B would be particularly useful to track aircraft flying over oceanic airspace.

Airservices is also contributing to a whole-of-government working group considering the Space Based Augmentation System or SBAS.

SBAS is the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) recognised enabling technology for the provision of Approach with Vertical Guidance (APV) and as a mitigation against controlled flight into terrain.

The applications for SBAS go far beyond aviation and presents opportunities for the maritime, agriculture and mining industries for example. It could also benefit consumer smart devices such as phones and tablets.

Accordingly one of the major considerations is cost.

Conservative estimates have put an Australian SBAS option at over 200 million dollars. Therefore the potential for the technology needs to be carefully considered before future commitments are made.

As Chair of Airservices, my mandate is clear. We are delivering on the agreed national plan for air safety that is shaping the way we operate.

With safety as our overriding focus, we must support an industry of national strategic importance to Australia. Safe, secure and efficient aviation underpins trade and tourism activities that contribute to our economic prosperity.

Safe and affordable air transport allows us to connect safely with our families across regional Australia, the whole continent and our trading partners across the world and ensure the security of our nation.

Not every policy or every decision that we make will directly benefit everyone in aviation, but a strong, well-managed and safe aviation system overall delivers benefit for everyone.

Such changes are not always easy, and will require investment and cooperation from everyone, but these changes have been well-planned over many years and agreed to by Government, by regulators and by the industry.

For Airservices, a collaboration with Defence will see the most significant transformation of air traffic management in our aviation history, through a program called OneSKY.

Air traffic growth in Australia has been forecast to double by 2030 and as our skies get busier, having separate air traffic management systems for civil and military flying which creates artificial divides and doesn't allow the most efficient use of our airspace, no longer make sense.

While we will still maintain independent capabilities, we will install a common civil-military air traffic management platform that will open up opportunities for more efficient and safe operations.

A joint system will save hundreds of millions of dollars for Australia in acquisition costs alone, and will deliver real benefits to industry.

It will be a system that can adapt to changes in air traffic growth and technology and a system where attention can be focussed on changing traffic requirements. It will mean we will have the

ability to manage civil and military aircraft more efficiently and reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

It will also enable us to connect those airports currently outside of the busy east coast network, delivering greater interconnectivity for regional airports and helping to ensure everyone has the right information at the right time to assist with decision making.

I am confident that Australia has a safe air traffic management system in our regions, in our cities and globally. We have the best air traffic controllers and fire fighters in the world.

When I am asked if it is safe to fly, my answer is unequivocally, yes. Looking around the room today, I know we are all of the same mind.

After all, this is the reason we are all here—we believe in the intrinsic nature of aviation to Australia and Australians and in the importance of aviation to regional Australia.

We want to contribute in our own small way to the continuing growth of the industry and more than that, to leave Australian aviation better, and safer, than when we joined it, regardless of whether you are flying into a major city, a regional airport or a rural airstrip.

Finally I'd like to thank the RAAA Chairman Jim Davis and CEO Paul Tyrrell for the opportunity to be here today and wish all of you the best for another successful convention.

Thank you all for listening and I look forward to catching up with many of you here at the convention.