

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Aircraft Cockpit Safety and Related Issues

Talking Points

Aircraft cockpit safety

- On 30 March 2015 Australia's major passenger airlines committed to update their standard operating procedures to require two members of the operating crew or authorised persons on the flight deck at all times in response to the Germanwings flight incident.
- After twelve months of operation, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) will conduct a post implementation review of these arrangements in consultation with interested parties.

Mental health and pilots

- CASA is considering the recommendations in the French safety investigation authority (BEA) Germanwings final report and their applicability to the Australian aviation environment which already recognises the importance of diagnosis and understanding of psychiatric illness.
- CASA intends to review Part 67 Regulations (medical) of the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations in line with the final report's observations about the ways of mitigating risk in psychiatric illness.
- CASA will also continue to monitor what other key jurisdictions such as the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) are considering in relation to these matters.

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Background

On 24 March 2015 an Airbus A320 operated by Germanwings crashed in the French Alps. In response to this incident Australia's major airlines agreed to update their standard operating procedures (SOPs) to require two members on the flight deck at all times.

At the time of this announcement the Government also announced that the arrangements will be formally reviewed after 12 months to determine their effectiveness and the handling of issues that arose out of the adoption of the procedures.

On 14 March 2016 the French Civil Aviation Safety Investigation Authority (the BEA) released its final report into the Germanwings incident making a number of safety recommendations in relation to the mental health monitoring for pilots and balancing medical confidentiality and public safety.

The final report findings state the Germanwings collision was due to the deliberate actions of the co-pilot who decided to commit suicide while alone in the cockpit. The report indicates that the process for medical certification of pilots, in particular self-reporting, did not succeed in preventing the co-pilot from flying while experiencing mental disorder with psychotic symptoms.

Contributing factors in the failure of the medical certification process include:

- probable fear of losing ability to fly if decrease in medical fitness was reported;
- financial consequences due to lack of specific insurance for loss of income if unfit to fly; and
- lack of clear guidelines in German regulations on when a threat to public safety outweighs the requirements of medical confidentiality.

The issues arising out of the final report on the loss of the Germanwings aircraft and any relevant work by ICAO will be examined by CASA and other aviation agencies in Australia.

Mental health assessment – Australian approach

Under the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations, pilots are required to undergo regular medical examinations to hold and retain a pilot licence.

These requirements are more stringent where the pilot wishes to work for a commercial airline carrying passengers.

CASA has been aware for many years of the prevalence of depressive illness and began certificating pilots with treated depression in the 1990's.

The safety recommendations in the final report relate to improving the medical evaluation of pilots with mental health issues and matters related to potential risk of loss of licence. In Australia there are already measures in place to address some of the concerns outlined in the report.

CASA has a programme in place that allows pilots on specific medication to treat depression to fly. The programme includes specific medical assessments and a list of accepted medication as well as clinical reviews and requirements for stability before being allowed to return to flying duties. The peer assistance network for pilots is also well developed in Australia another recommendation in the BEA report.

In addition, personal information can be disclosed by a medical professional if it represents a serious threat to public health or public safety. Australia provides specific indemnification for Designated Aviation Medical Examiners (DAMEs) and also for health practitioners responding to questions asked by CASA.