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Aircraft Cockpit Safety and Security

Talking Points

- On 30 March 2015 Australia's major international, domestic and regional passenger airlines committed to immediately update their standard operating procedures to require two members of the operating crew or authorised persons on the flight deck at all times.
- The pilot in command of the aircraft will retain operational discretion on the application of these requirements, to ensure safe operations, depending on flight crew circumstances.
- These arrangements will be formally reviewed after 12 months by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, in consultation with the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and the aviation industry, to determine their effectiveness.
- As the investigation into the tragic loss of Germanwings flight 4U9525 proceeds, Government aviation agencies will work with the Australian aviation industry and other key stakeholders to identify improvements to the safety and security of aircraft cockpits as appropriate.
- Australia will also actively engage in the international consideration by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) of any proposals to update current aviation safety and security standards and recommended practices.

[If asked] Mental health issues and pilots

- 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.
- Part of our Government aviation agency work with the industry and other key stakeholders to identify improvements to aviation safety and security will include looking at medical testing and reporting issues, including mental health assessments, related to flight crew members.

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SENSITIVITIES

On 24 March 2015 an Airbus A320 operated by Germanwings crashed in the French Alps. All passengers and crew were killed. There were two Australians on board - mother and son, Carol and Greig Friday.

BACKGROUND

French investigators have stated that the co-pilot, Mr Andreas Lubitz, deliberately crashed the aircraft. Analysis of the black box data suggests that the pilot in command, Captain Patrick Sondenheimer, was unable to enter the flight deck as Mr Lubitz disabled the cockpit entry panel.

On 6 May 2015, the French investigation agency released its preliminary report, making a number of preliminary findings, including in relation to the mental health and licensing of the co-pilot, discussed further below.

International Response

The actions taken by Australian airlines to require two people on the flight deck at all times are consistent with the approach taken in other countries such as the United States, Canada, the European Union, India and New Zealand.

Australia will also actively engage in the international consideration of any updating of aviation safety and security standards and recommended practices arising out of the investigation into the loss of the aircraft, through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Australian officials attended the ICAO Aviation Security Panel meeting in Montreal in the week beginning Monday 13 April 2015. s33(a), s33(b)

Mental Health Assessment and Reporting

A preliminary finding (Preliminary Report issued on 6 May 2015) of the French investigation agency was that the co-pilot had an episode of depression and was taking medication to treat that condition which delayed the renewal of his Class 1 Medical Certificate between April and July 2009. Subsequently, the Medical Certificate was issued in July 2009 with conditions, reportedly that Mr Lubitz submit to regular medical examinations.

Australian aviation agencies, in consultation with the aviation industry and key stakeholders including airline staff associations, will examine medical testing and reporting issues, including mental health assessments, related to flight crew members.

This work will be informed by the outcomes of the investigation into flight 4U9525.

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