



Australian Government

Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Evolving the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB)

**Presented by Chief Commissioner Greg Hood for the ITSA
Annual Conference 2017**

Speaking notes:

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Watashi wa Australia shusshindesu

I am honoured and privileged to be able to join you today at the ITSA Annual Conference here in Tokyo, Japan. I would also like to pay my respects to our hosts from the Japan Transport Safety Board, in particular their Chairman Mr Kazuhiro Nakahashi.

When taking up my appointment as the ATSB's Chief Commissioner on 1 July 2016, I took every opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of our operational environment, our business model/practices, our people and the challenges we collectively faced. In gaining this appreciation I committed to an

intensive meeting agenda with all relevant government authorities and industry stakeholders. I also facilitated a program of one-on-one discussions with every one of my 100 staff members.

This allowed me to garner many ideas as to how we can improve our operations – which were largely consistent with my own observations and thoughts.

Like our colleagues from the Accident Investigation Board Norway (in reference to the organisational challenges presented through their abstract), the ATSB was enduring significant resourcing challenges which was seriously impeding its ability to meet prescribed deliverables and Key Performance Indicators, particularly in regards to the time taken to complete its safety investigation reports - on average the ATSB was completing about 30% of its complex investigation reports within the prescribed 12 months with some reports taking up to three years to finalise.

Since becoming an independent statutory authority in July 2009, the ATSB's base appropriations had continued to reduce over successive financial years as the agency competed for funds with other important initiatives within the federal budgets. To manage these fiscal constraints, the ATSB had progressively reduced its staffing profile by an overall 25 per cent. In managing these reductions we facilitated a proportioned downsize across every business area within our organisational structure including corporate services.

Conversely during this period, there has been a significant and sustained increase in passenger growth and operating complexity across all three of the transport modes (aviation, rail and maritime) that we are required to cover as part of our mandated legislative functions as outlined in the *Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003*.

The Act states that the ATSB's primary function is to improve transport safety, and our government's "Statement of Expectations" requires us to continue to give priority to transport safety investigations that have the potential to deliver the best safety outcomes for the travelling public. When taking into account the known and projected financial and environmental challenges facing the agency, it was incumbent upon me to seek ways to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations. We could no longer afford (literally) to be complacent and continue with the mantra of "that's the way we do things around here".

The long-standing organisational structure was rigid and consisted of too many divisional lines that presented a range of constraints, limitations and variabilities in how we allocated resources and the way in which we worked. Our resources and deliverables were primarily geared towards completing occurrence investigations and I was concerned these resources were not being selectively allocated towards investigating those accidents and incidents that would have the greatest potential for safety learnings and enhancement.

To demonstrate our overall effectiveness, I determined we must change organizationally to improve transport safety outside of these traditional investigations, through safety issue investigations, through greater interaction with operators and regulators, with data and other intelligence in our possession, and through education and promotion.

Effectively we needed to embark on a “step change”, where we would take our current resources (people and business operating systems) and realign them to achieve greater operational efficiencies and effectiveness. Along the way I needed to create an environment which empowers our people and maximises their opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Therefore I knew that a critical success factor for this evolution would be a paradigm shift in the way we think, moving from an accepted point of view to embracing a new one - noting the ATSB had not undergone any significant change in a number of years. Bringing to bear my knowledge of other multi-modal/multi-sectorial agencies and acting on my own experiential learnings, I decided to implement a significant transformation initiative known as the “Evolution” program. This program, in essence, was designed to enable better resource allocation and utilisation across the agency. It was underpinned by a number of change imperatives including:

- Shifting our strategic focus towards becoming a fully capable and mature data-driven organisation - moving from reactive to proactive with a strong desire to eventually become predictive;
- Recognising the importance/imperative of improving safety by raising industry and community safety awareness, knowledge and action through safety education and promotion;
- Moving from output or report focused, to outcome focused – making a difference;
- Improving our cumbersome procedural framework;
- Re-establishing accredited learning and development pathways;
- Strengthening our recruitment, performance and talent management frameworks;
- Developing a culture of empowerment, performance and continuous improvement;
- Re-energising our workforce; and
- Establishing greater financial assuredness and sustainability.

Ultimately, the overarching objective of the program was to create an environment where all ATSB employees work collaboratively as “one team”. Implicitly, our staff will be empowered and given every opportunity to bring to bear their collective core investigative skills, shared values, passion and drive to improve transport safety.

Over the ensuing 12 months, the Evolution program has certainly lived up to its connotation. While there have been changes within our organisational structure - most notably the introduction of multi-disciplined/modal investigator teams - the program has also provided the impetus to refine our business practices and expand our deliverables.

As prescribed through our revised Corporate Plan covering the next four years (noting that copies have been provided to audience), the ATSB will have a renewed focus on data collection, analysis and research, and will raise industry and community safety awareness through increased safety education and communications.

The ATSB will be able to more selectively allocate resources to investigate accidents and serious incidents that have the greatest potential for improving safety for the travelling public. We will also make advances in the timeliness of completed reports.

Recent developments

I am pleased to inform you that following a number of meetings with our Government, we have been successful in gaining some additional funding under a budget initiative entitled “improving transport safety”. This increase in funding will enable the ATSB 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.

Through a recent recruitment campaign designed to fill up to 16 new Transport Safety Investigator positions we were able to attract 866 applicants and therefore I am confident we will be able to complement our existing workforce with high caliber personnel. In addition, we have been able to fill a number of key operational support roles including the recent appointment of a dedicated Data Warehouse Manager.

Concurrently, we have progressed a sub-program known as “Back on Track” which by design has allowed us to accelerate the completion of approx. 50 investigations that had overrun duration and effort targets. This has also provided us the opportunity to review and carefully refine our investigation practices, procedures and workflows leading to a number of improvements including:

- The introduction of an initial strategic planning session for each investigation which considers known information from site and initial inquiries and decides on:
 - Should the investigation be discontinued?
 - Potential safety factors and issues?
 - Key lines of further inquiry to substantiate or discount factors
 - Predicted investment of effort required & agreed investigation Category
 - Communications strategies (including Preliminary report, Web updates, discontinuation statement)

- The introduction of periodic safety factor reviews (every 2-3 months) to consider information from investigative inquiry and analysis to decide on:
 - Validated and discounted safety factors
 - Validated, discounted and potential safety issues
 - Safety action proposed and undertaken
 - Investigation profile ranking and risks
 - Further lines of inquiry & assignment
 - Re-categorisation (up or down)
 - Communications strategy review.

- The inclusion of a final safety factor review which the Chief Commissioner attends - to consider the proposed findings and safety issues, and confirm:
 - Validated safety factors
 - Validated safety issues
 - Safety action undertaken and any further proposed
 - No further investigation required
 - Stakeholder risks & mitigation
 - Communications strategy review (report, media engagement, industry, NoK)
 - Executive approval workflow stages required.

Combined, these initiatives will enable us to improve the timeliness of our reports while maintain high standards of quality assuredness.

In regards to other important initiatives that have progressed over the past 12 months, I am particularly pleased that we have been able to re-establish our status as a Registered Training Organisation through partnering with a local external training provider. This has positioned the ATSB to continue delivering and accrediting our national recognised Diploma of Transport Safety Investigation.

Future outlook

I am looking forward to continuing to learn and grow in my role as Chief Commissioner of the ATSB. The years ahead will be exciting and challenging for the ATSB and I remain confident that the continued professionalism and capability of our people will ensure we remain a world-leading transport safety investigation agency to deliver the best safety outcomes for the travelling public.