

Opening Address by Dr Allan Hawke, Secretary of the Department of Transport and Regional Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be here today to open the fourth annual airsafety seminar jointly organised by the Australian and New Zealand societies of air safety investigators.

This year's theme is 'aviation safety for the 21st century in the Asia Pacific region'. We chose that theme because we recognise that now is the time to start looking at the issues which will affect air safety in our region into the next century.

We are meeting in a region - the Asia-Pacific - where aviation activity is growing at one of the fastest rates in the world. Yet our region still has a very good safety record. To help keep that record, it is vitally important that we continually improve our air safety investigation and accident prevention skills.

The growth in aviation activity - passenger and freight - is forecast to continue for the foreseeable future. It will occur not only on the well established major routes but also as direct traffic increases between smaller centres through out our region.

This growth will present new challenges for those of us in aviation safety.

- There will be new, smaller operators who do not have the infrastructure and corporate memory of the well established larger operators;
- The routes may not be as well-served by navigation and airport facilities;
- Aviation safety administrations will need to look at standardising procedures and safety requirements, assisting with safety information and data, and introducing proactive safety programs and greater surveillance.

Ensuring that aviation traffic can grow safely will not be easy and the difficult task will fall heavily on aviation safety specialists like the people in this room.

But I know that aviation safety experts are used to challenges. In Australia, aviation safety has had a very high public profile in recent years. This has been due to a small number of very unfortunate accidents, including two fatal accidents involving smaller public transport aircraft.

By world standards these accidents were relatively minor although that did not make them any less traumatic for the relatives and friends of those involved - but they have had a fundamental effect on aviation safety regulation in this country.

The Bureau of Air Safety Investigation is an agency within my department. It conducted full investigations into these accidents and, in accordance with ICAO recommendations, it made sure that the investigations considered all aspects of these accidents, including operational and organisational factors to do with the companies and the regulatory agency involved.

In fact, it could be argued that it was BASI's identifying these latter factors which had the most safety impact. Certainly, the regulatory and safety oversight authority that we have now - the Civil Aviation Safety Authority - has and is undergoing fundamental change following those accidents and BASI's reports.

It is this systemic investigation approach which is achieving the greatest benefits in improving aviation safety - looking not only at what occurred at the 'sharp end' (in the cockpit or in the air traffic control centre) but also at all the organisational things leading up to the occurrence. I know these are all matters of considerable interest to you, as representatives of the aviation industry and people interested in aviation safety. They are also of vital concern to me. As the secretary of the responsible commonwealth department, I am reassured by the very low rate of public transport accidents worldwide and particularly in the Asia Pacific region. but I know there is always more we can do to reduce the accident rate and I know my minister thinks the same way.

I am sure you have heard many commentators predicting that, as the amount of aviation activity increases, we will see major accidents at a frequency which will be unacceptable to the aviation industry and the general public. Airline safety records that have been acceptable up till now will become unacceptable unless accident rates fall.

Reducing accident rates is and should be the major concern of officers of my department as well as aviation safety specialists around the world.

Every major aircraft accident brings with it enormous costs in human suffering and in financial terms. The TWA 800 investigation in the United States for example is reported to have cost over \$100 million so far. Costs alone provide powerful incentives to prevent such accidents.

Seminars like this one play an important part in fostering greater cooperation and liaison between safety specialists in our region. They also act as catalysts for new ideas and developments that go towards achieving our safety goals.

You attending this conference are part of an international aviation safety network. The Australian and New Zealand societies are regional chapters of the international society of air safety investigators, which has its headquarters in Washington.

The society's total membership worldwide is 1500 individual members and 130 corporate members. In Australia and New Zealand there are over 150 members of the society, which reflects the interest and importance of aviation safety in our region. there are many more members in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, including most of the international operators, many of whom are represented here today.

It is because of this priority on aviation safety that there has been much closer liaison and exchange of information in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia's BASI has taken a leading role in establishing excellent operational and working relationships with the Asia-Pacific aviation community and is working with industry and governments to develop a regional safety culture.