



Dangerous Times

Radar safety deficiency in Tasmania 222 could have died – could happen again

At 10.16pm on 1 May 2008, in pitch darkness and in bad weather, two jets – a Virgin 737 with 121 people on board and a Jetstar A320 with 101 people on board - were about to land at Launceston Airport.

There was, however, fog down to 200 feet so both aircraft climbed away to circle for another attempt. The aircraft were operating in an archaic, “do-it-yourself” 1920s-style airspace system where each pilot had to radio the other pilot and work out how their aircraft should avoid collision.

In other countries, the air traffic control radar operator would give instructions to keep the aircraft apart.

When, by sheer luck, the Jetstar pilots saw the Virgin Blue’s landing lights coming towards them through a break in the fog, they climbed past its altitude to miss both the other jet and terrain.

No doubt the passengers had no idea that both aircrews – already under high mental loading from flying a difficult bad weather instrument approach at the lowest level –

were not able to use the excellent radar system which covers the airport, as the correct controlled airspace system under the previous Government’s policy was never introduced.

What’s more concerning is that after an unexplainable two year delay, the final Government Report on the incident published by the supposedly “independent” Australian Transport Safety Bureau (“ATSB”) was changed after secret submissions. The Report made no safety recommendations at all and ignored the perilous neglect of not using our existing radar to keep our skies safer.

Why did the ATSB fail to make the obvious recommendation – that the radar should be used at Launceston as well as Hobart Airport to save passengers’ lives?

A dossier on such lack of leadership and dangerous failings in our skies, including a detailed letter to our Prime Minister Julia Gillard on the subject, is published on my air safety reform site.

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This Announcement has been written, placed and funded by Dick Smith, PO Box 418, Terrey Hills, NSW, 2084
in the interests of Australian aviation safety