

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**WRITTEN QUESTION**

Ms J Carney

to Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services

Police Aircraft Servicing

What servicing arrangements are in place for the maintenance of Territory Police aircraft? Is there any compelling reason that maintenance work would be carried out on police aircraft interstate rather than with Territory companies?

ANSWER

The service contract for the Pilatus PC-12 police aircraft was recently held by a Northern Territory business operator, who did not renew the contract which concluded on 31 May 2005.

Following a request for new tenders in March 2005, it emerged that no operators in the Northern Territory who tendered for this work could offer factory-trained staff at the time. Due to the important specialist support role provided by the police aircraft, immediate alternate servicing arrangements were required to prevent the possibility of the aircraft becoming grounded through a lack of maintenance.

Routine maintenance on both police aircraft is carried out in Alice Springs at the Police Air Section's leased hangar by a factory-trained engineer based in Alice Springs in conjunction with factory-trained staff from a South Australian operator. Non-routine maintenance is carried out in Alice Springs by this Alice Springs-based engineer, whilst non-routine maintenance is carried out in Darwin by SAE Aircraft Engineering and Total Avionics Services. Both are Northern Territory-based business operators however, neither operator in Darwin employs factory-trained staff. This deficiency was overcome however, by consultation with the South Australian operator who has two qualified staff and use of the Pilatus factory representative, if required.

Whenever an aircraft maintenance task exceeds the capability of both Northern Territory options, the police aircraft is flown to Adelaide to the home base of the aircraft's distributor, Pilatus Australia. This has the added advantage of maintenance being conducted close to vital spare parts, and close to the Pilatus Factory Engineering and Technical Representative.

Until permanent tender arrangements that include provision of trained staff, the continued airworthiness and safe operation of the police aircraft is best achieved through the use of trained engineers who unfortunately may not be based in the Northern Territory. It is estimated that each police aircraft may be required to travel to Adelaide once a year for routine maintenance under this temporary servicing arrangement.

It is hoped that permanent tender arrangements using an NT operator can be achieved in the near future. The NT Police supports the use of local business operators wherever possible, however in this instance, it must be balanced against the best maintenance achievable and the safest operation possible of these two valuable and essential assets.

NTPFES is in the process of obtaining approval to decline tenders and a new specification will be developed in the near future and advertised accordingly.