

MEDIA RELEASE

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Airservices signs contract for remote tower technology trials

Airservices Australia has committed to trialling remote tower technology in Australia with the signing of a contract with Saab yesterday in Canberra.

The nation's air navigation service provider intends to evaluate the technology at Alice Springs in Central Australia from late 2012, with the control centre in Adelaide – more than 1500km away.

Airservices has been studying the potential technical, engineering, human factors and regulatory aspects of the potential introduction of the technology to Australia over the past 12 months.

Airservices Acting General Manager Air Traffic Control, Mark Rodwell, said the proposed evaluation of the technology would provide a good test of its viability in remote and harsh conditions.

“Due to the cost of primary and back-up data communications in Australia, we estimate the initial operating costs of a remote tower centre are roughly the same as a traditional tower to start with, but reducing over time,” Mr Rodwell said.

Weather presents another issue to be contended with. “Unlike Europe, we will have to deal with heat, dust and very occasionally, heavy rain at our site in Alice Springs,” he said.

A lack of multiple communication systems in Australia's sparsely populated interior means providing appropriate back-up paths for critical data in the event of an outage is also a challenging task.

“For example, using an available alternative fibre-optic route for path diversity will involve a transmission distance of around 7,000km,” Mr Rodwell said.

He said continued engagement with regulators, the industry, air traffic control workforce and the community would also be required.

“Such a leading edge technology will take a considerable amount of thought and discussion before gaining regulatory approval for its use. We look forward to working closely with our partners and regulators to place the technology in the air traffic control toolbox for future use.”

The announcement follows the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Saab and Swedish ANSP and airport operator Luftfartsverket (LFV) for the delivery and support of a remotely operated tower solution last year. Airways NZ also joined the project in late 2010.

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