

## The Australian Friday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006

THE federal Government is poised to announce a joint initiative with industry to help boost the flagging general aviation sector.

Transport Minister Warren Truss revealed this week that details of an "action agenda" on general aviation would probably be announced within two weeks.

Mr Truss said the Government had set up action agendas for a range of industries, particularly those facing challenges.

A working group would be formed to allow the industry to have a hard look at its future and the policy mix required to ensure it had one.

"There are absolutely no presuppositions," Mr Truss said.

"The industry has a good hard look at itself and says what do we need to to fix it.

"But if the solution is 'fairy godmothers need to rain money on us' - well, forget about that. They need to look at what practically they can do, living in a real world."

The Government response comes as general aviation groups worried about the industry's decline are joining forces to tackle some of the issues.

There is a move to get the associations involved in general aviation to form an umbrella group to lobby the government.

Industry participants are worried about rising government charges, the loss of airports and a general lack of recognition of the industry.

They want the Government to include general aviation in its infrastructure policies.

"General aviation is part of the total transport infrastructure and it needs somebody to realise that it's important," said Seaplane Pilots Association Australia chairman Philip Dulhunty, who has been spearheading a push to publicise the industry crisis.

"But they just take it for granted until, suddenly, all the airports have disappeared."

Mr Truss agreed that general aviation, which has been declining for a number of years, faced challenges.

He said the fleet was old and expensive to maintain and modernise.

"There's a lot of anxiety in the general aviation sector at the present time," he said.

"It's self-evident that the industry is changing quite dramatically.

"Some of the concerns come from, perhaps, an insular position.

"If you're locked into a particular sector of the industry, perhaps you're not noticing there are some other sectors of the industry that are doing pretty well, particularly sport aviation."

Mr Truss said there was big growth in the larger sports aircraft that were outside the regulatory system.

He said this was because sports aviation was cheaper and people could get a brand new aircraft with modern technology rather than the older planes used by GA.

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The other sector also doing well was helicopters.

"So all the facts plus the natural difficulties GA is having having are squeezing that sector and we need to look at what's the best way head.

"Can we have a general aviation sector, for instance, that's less regulated?

"Is it the lack of regulation that's attracting people to sport aviation?

"We need to look at it more closely and see if there are some things we can learn from that sector that can be transferred to general aviation.

"And AOPA (The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association) is expressing some interest in lifting the maximum weight (of aircraft) that can be taken essentially outside the system.

"I don't have any position on those sorts of issues but that's what action agendas are about - talking about what the options might be for the future and developing a blueprint."

Mr Truss emphasised that the working group was not seen to be captive to a particular organisation.

"We would be looking to drive this agenda with people who have skills rather than membership of a particular organisation," he said.

"Naturally you'd want to engage organisations like AOPA and others who are peak bodies for the general aviation sector."

Asked about the vexed question of cost recovery, Mr Truss said aviation would never return to the old system.

He said something like 80 per cent of costs were still picked up by taxpayers but he conceded the small amount of cost recovery already introduced was being taken hard by the industry.

He cited the argument over medical fees as an example of an industry concern prompting another look at policy.