

MEDIA RELEASE

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Airports association watching customs charges and services

The chairman of the New Zealand Airports Association, Steven Fitzgerald, said today that airports are watching very closely how Customs is delivering its services and funding them.

“There is a risk that the very good work airports are doing in attracting international air services, growing tourism and boosting regional economies could be undercut. The situation at Hamilton International Airport is highlighting significant issues.

“Airports need to know what the government’s policy is for funding Customs border services, and the rules need to be followed consistently, said Mr Fitzgerald.

The policy of full government funding for Customs services at medium and high volume international airports was agreed in 2005 after industry consultation. New international airports self-fund passenger clearance services until passenger volumes reach 9000 per year and then government funding is triggered. Hamilton has averaged about 100,000 international passengers per year for ten years.

The government policy makes sense, said Mr Fitzgerald, because airports make a vital contribution to tourism and trade by strengthening connections with the rest of the world. But when the aviation and tourism sectors are working hard to grow passenger numbers and attract new services, it won’t make sense if one government service is not playing its part, prevents innovation, or levies unexpected charges.

The policy for airports that are re-establishing international services has been under review recently but that process has not reached a conclusion, said Mr Fitzgerald. There is uncertainty that needs to be resolved so airports know where they stand with Customs when they are negotiating to attract new services. It’s a case of New Zealand Inc. needing to work together because major economic benefits and growth are at stake, said Mr Fitzgerald.

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