

Same pilot at controls of Tiger safety breach flights

The same pilot was behind two breaches which led to the grounding of Tiger Airways.

THE two Tiger Airways flights that last month breached height safety limits, triggering the grounding of the airline until August 1, were piloted by the same captain.

But aviation sources told The Sunday Age that the pilot had not been given any retraining after the first incident at Melbourne Airport on June 7, before he again made an unsafe low approach to Avalon Airport on June 30.

The pilot has been interviewed by both the Australian Transport Safety Bureau and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority over the two incidents, but neither authority will identify the pilot or discuss his role in the incidents.

Tiger Airways also refused to identify the captain or allow him to answer questions. Spokeswoman Vanessa Regan said the airline's priority was to resume services as soon as possible. She said no jobs had been lost since the airline was grounded and that the airline had no further comment, "as the incidents are still being reviewed by Tiger and the relevant authorities".

The transport safety bureau found in its preliminary report of the Melbourne Airport incident that the information already programmed into the plane's navigational computer had been inaccurate, and incompatible with the paper flight path for the entry to Melbourne Airport.

The bureau is expected to release on Wednesday its preliminary findings of the second, more serious, incident at Avalon.

The pilots' union representative, Lawrie Cox of the Australian Federation of Air Pilots, said he had accompanied the man to both hearings, and that he was a "very experienced" pilot with both domestic and long-haul experience.

Mr Cox was adamant there was little fault with the pilot's flying in the first incident, saying "the database was the issue, not necessarily the pilot".

"At no stage was either aircraft, passengers or crew in any significant risk of being in an accident ... We don't believe there will be any action against our pilots in this circumstance," Mr Cox said.

He also said there was no reason why Tiger Airways should have retrained the captain after the first incident, because all internal procedures were followed.

"The pilots were dealt with in the normal manner that you would expect from any airline," Mr Cox said.

He could not speak in detail about the second incident because it was still under investigation, but he said Tiger Airways' internal processes had not had time to work after it, because 24 hours later, the fleet was grounded by CASA, citing "a serious and imminent risk to air safety".

One hundred Tiger Airways pilots were ordered back into training last week in flight simulators, but Mr Cox said this was more to do with the airline officially recording their training rather than the training itself.

He said his members had been "unfairly painted as the crux of the issue. The problem is more about the management systems ... rather than these two incidents."

Avalon Airport chief executive Justin Giddings said the regional airport's expansion plans, including a \$50 million international terminal, would not be threatened if Tiger did not fly again in Australia as long as Jetstar continued to fly from there.

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