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## **Dog handlers to stay for now**

The Department of Agriculture and Food has backed down on its decision to halve the number of dog handlers performing quarantine duties at the Perth domestic airport for the time being.

It has given a commitment to the WA Industrial Relations Commission that the positions will remain in place until at least January 31, 2013 before some of them are redeployed to other department roles.

The offer was made after the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association challenged cost-cutting measures to slash the number of handlers from eight to four.

“We have heard one of the reasons they want to downsize the unit is due to a reduction in statistics,” CPSU/CSA Branch Secretary Toni Walkington said.

There were 12.6 million passengers travelling through the airport terminals in 2012, an increase of 10.3 per cent from 2011 with 20.2 million expected by the year 2031.

In 2011-12 quarantine airport staff seized 1993kg of prohibited material with another 9330kg collected in amnesty bins for a total of 11,323kg.

In a further security compromise the dog handlers were instructed to limit the number of suspect samples sent off for internal testing.

Ten samples were earmarked for testing with four being a serious concern and three lost in transit.

Ms Walkington said it didn't make sense to increase the risk of prohibited insects, animal insects, plants, animals diseases and weeds making their way into WA by reducing quarantine coverage at the airport.

“In April then Treasurer Christian Porter said the latest round of Barnett Government cutbacks to essential public services would not impact on frontline service delivery yet this is a clear example that it will,” she said.

A change in policy saw the handlers pair up and work on flights together as opposed to splitting up and working on one flight each at the same time.

Ms Walkington said when this happened the handlers were concerned their statistics would decrease.

Now some flights are not even checked and under the proposed cutbacks weekend and late night flights will not be covered at all.

Ms Walkington said the agricultural industry contributed \$6billion to WA's economy each year meaning biosecurity should not be compromised.

"It's another case of the Barnett Government not sharing the benefits of the mining boom and making sure the public sector is adequately resourced to do the job the community expects it to do."

**FOR COMMENT:**

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