

89. To ensure right decisions on a number of problems which now confront Tasman Empire Airways, Limited, it is necessary to look to the future. The Solents which have been ordered would normally have a life of seven years, but advances in the design of transport aircraft may force their replacement in a shorter period.

90. It is our opinion that there is grave doubt whether the Solents will be replaced by seaplanes. We base this opinion on several considerations, but one has, we think, an over-riding importance. Seaplanes are now very much in the minority in world aviation, and few new type seaplanes are now being designed and built. Experience shows that aeronautical progress in any field is roughly proportioned to the effort expended in that field. Inevitably, therefore, the rate of aeronautical progress must be much slower for seaplanes than landplanes. When, in a few years' time, the selection of the Solent replacement becomes necessary, there will be several new type landplanes in the running for every new type seaplane. In fact, according to present indications, there is doubt whether there will be a single new type seaplane available then of a size suitable for the Tasman crossing, the Saunders-Roe boat (SR 45.) being too large to share the traffic with the Christchurch landplane service, which, in our view, is necessary and inevitable. In these circumstances, it is unrealistic to plan on the off chance that a seaplane will compete successfully with its many landplane rivals when the selection of the Solent replacement becomes due.

91. We do not think it is any answer to say that a new type seaplane could be designed, built, proved, and produced in the numbers needed, by the time the Solent is due for replacement. Even were there time for this—and it would take more than five years—the large development costs would not be justified for the Tasman service alone. Only if the new seaplane type also fulfilled other needs—perhaps those of military aviation—would it be reasonable to incur those development costs. Even if there were such other needs, the necessity to design the aircraft as a compromise between the needs of the Tasman service and those of the other operator would further reduce the already small chance of its proving a successful competitor to landplanes.

92. In view of what has been said about an international aerodrome at Wellington, this does not necessarily determine the issue. The need to serve Wellington may justify the retention of seaplanes in the system of trans-Tasman operations for a longer period than would otherwise be warranted.

93. The proposed development of the Mechanics Bay seaplane base for the operation of Solents, which includes a hangar, engine repair shop, stores, hard standing and slipway, at a cost of something over £300,000 should be carefully considered in the light of the prospective