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Hit squad for airport gets OK

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Geoff Gallop has welcomed the decision by the Federal Government to pay for the establishment of a full-time police presence at major Australian airports, including Perth, as part of its response to a damning review of Australian airport security.

Prime Minister John Howard con-

'Airport workers needed to be physically searched or screened when they went into restricted areas.'

firmed yesterday that the Federal Government would set up counter-terrorism response teams and community policing under a single commander at the 11 airports. It would also pay for an investigation incident team to be stationed at Australia's five biggest airports, again including Perth.

The teams would be under the command of the Australian Federal Police but would contain officers seconded from local forces.

The premier praised the move yesterday and said it was important to have one clear commanding authority at airports.

A report by British expert Sir John Wheeler released last week criticised the lack of communication between Australian authorities at airports.

It said that policing at major airports was often inadequate and dysfunctional and that security systems were uncoordinated, partly due to bureaucratic turf wars. It also said that while 80 per cent of airfreight cargo is carried on passenger aircraft not all of it was screened, a situation which increased the risk of explosives being placed on aircraft.

Norman Shanks, former head of security at Heathrow Airport in London and now director of Perth-based aviation security firm QRSciences, said the Wheeler report had outlined significant problems with Australia's airports.

More use needed to be made of technology to help security personnel detect potential threats. Although the Federal Government was doing background checks on everyone who worked at airports, workers needed to be physically searched or screened when they went into restricted areas.