

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report
199800983**

**Airbus
A320
Boeing Co
B737**

22 March 1998

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As the tracks of the aircraft converged, the crew of the A320 was given descent to FL350 by the Melbourne Central controller, who momentarily forgot about the B737. As soon as the crew of the A320 reported leaving FL370, the controller realised that he could not guarantee the required horizontal separation standard of 5 NM and immediately instructed them to return to FL370.

The A320 had descended to FL368 before the crew were able to arrest the descent and commence climb back to FL370 and re-establish a vertical separation standard.

The investigation revealed that the aircraft were at the same flight level, with a horizontal separation of 4.7 NM, resulting in a breakdown of separation standards.

The practice of early hand-off is being reviewed by Airservices Australia as it can lead to a reduced level of awareness by controllers.

