



VSA AIRFIELDS, AIRSPACE AND AVIONICS OFFICER'S REPORT

The following airspace and aerodrome issues affecting VSA members were raised in the past 12 months:

1. Increased Enroute Class E Airspace

In December 2021 Airservices consulted industry on a proposal to lower the base of Class E airspace to 1,500ft (AGL) in medium and high density enroute airspace between Cairns and Melbourne. This proposal is part of a broader Airspace Modernisation Program being developed by Airservices, and encompasses all areas marked Class E 8500LL on the current charts. It affects many Gliding sites and their operations nationally, but almost all gliding clubs in Victoria will be impacted. GFA did not support the proposal due to a lack of information and our initial analysis of the impacts to Gliding and aviation safety. Based on industry feedback received, Airservices refined the design and proposed moving the base level of Class E airspace along the east coast to be 4,500ft, 6,500ft or 8,500ft Above Mean Sea Level (AMSL) depending on terrain. This latest proposal is clearly aimed at providing airlines, RPT operators and other IFR traffic a better service from Airservices now they have better surveillance capability. However, it does so in a manner that denies non-transponder and non-radio equipped VFR airspace users access to that airspace, with safety and cost concerns to VFR aircraft operators. GFA responded to the latest proposal advising the need for the airspace change has not been substantiated in the context of increased consequential risks to VFR traffic, compressed into lower, slower airspace, and that other options must be explored collaboratively. Although consultation on this latest proposal closed on 30 April, Airservices is yet to respond to the latest industry feedback. Rumour has it that the proposal will not get through the CASA Office of Airspace Regulation and has been shelved. All will be revealed in due course.

2. Mangalore

In mid-July and early August 2021 I attended a teleconference with Airservices to discuss the implementation of a Surveillance Flight Information Service (SFIS) at Ballina and Mangalore airports. This proposal is related to the proposal to increased Enroute Class E Airspace on the Eastern as described at 1 above. Airservices has now advised that it is planning to introduce the [Surveillance Flight Information Service \(SFIS\)](#) at Mangalore on 9 September, subject to a legislative instrument to be issued by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) giving effect to the service. Airservices is progressing the transition activities, including air traffic controller training, preparation of operational documentation and regulatory engagement. On 12 August, a dedicated controller based in Melbourne Air Traffic Services Centre (ATSC) utilising available surveillance capabilities will be available to provide Safety Alerts for Mangalore on the CTAF frequency in accordance with Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) and established rule sets. This will provide an interim risk control at Mangalore, before SFIS is fully implemented. The Mangalore gliding club does not believe this will affect them as they are already monitoring the Area Frequency.

3. Access to Class A Airspace

For the best part of four decades, CASA has provided authorisation for glider pilots to access Class A airspace for high altitude wave flights. The approval is promulgated by a CASA Instrument that is renewed every few years upon application by GFA and the payment of a fee. The last approval was via Instrument number CASA EX86/18, that expired on 30 June 2021. Although GFA sought its renewal in late April 2021 and paid the invoiced fee, an officer of CASA has unilaterally decided not to renew the instrument as he does not accept GFA's Safety Case supporting the exemption. At the time of writing this report, glider pilots do not

have approval to operate in Class A airspace. GFA has elevated this matter to higher levels within CASA and are hopeful of a favourable resolution.

4. High-altitude balloon flights for bushfire monitoring in SA and VIC during Q2-Q3 2021

High-altitude balloon flights will be conducted over the coming months in and around the Grampians to demonstrate a novel Earth Observation platform for the monitoring of bushfires. The balloons will ascend and descend between SFC and 100,000 ft, which may pose a hazard to air traffic. The Grampians Soaring Club has been notified and its CFI is liaising directly with the balloon operator.

5. Proposal to amend Class A, C, E and G frequency boundaries in Tasmania

In May 2021 Airservices proposed amendments to the Class A, C, E and G frequency boundaries in Tasmania. Airservices advises this re-alignment and rationalisation of frequency boundaries is intended to simplify frequency requirements and improve efficiency, traffic management and overall safety in preparation for projected traffic increases. This change will also address issues arising from short term weather phenomena that impact certain frequencies by providing suitable alternate frequency options or coverage. The matter has been raised with the Soaring Club of Tasmania.

6. Gliding Operations on Closed Runways at Benalla

In early July the ATSB informed me that they had received a report of an increasing trend of gliders operating in contravention of NOTAM'd runway closures at Benalla, Vic. The reporter (believed to be the aerodrome reporting officer) advised that they had made contact with the local gliding club and was asked to send future NOTAMs to them. They were happy to comply but believe this should not be necessary because all pilots should be checking the published NOTAMs anyway. The reporter was concerned that operating on a soft wet surface was going to result in an incident causing damage or injury. The gliding Club President accepted that operations had been conducted from a closed runway on one day but disputes the reporter's assertion that there is an 'increasing trend'. The Club is working with the aerodrome operator to find a better way to manage the inspection and closing of the gliding runways.

7. Bacchus Marsh Aerodrome

The Bacchus Marsh aerodrome operator is in litigation with a locally based Chinese owned flying school. The flying school, which has substantial financial backing, is seeking to wind-up the aerodrome management entity so that it can assume the management role. The three gliding Clubs at Bacchus Marsh are concerned about their security of tenure.

Christopher Thorpe
13 August 2021