



[Print this page](#)

## Bumpy ride for airspace reform

By Steve Creedy  
27aug04

AIRSERVICES Australia's board meets today under strong pressure from lobby groups to abandon, or delay, its preferred option for fixing the botched introduction of airspace reforms last November.

Private and sports pilots have been lobbying intensely to torpedo an Airservices study backing an option to roll back some of the airspace reforms.

They have written to board members to press their case that the complex mathematical model underpinning the Airservices study is flawed and not validated by real-world data.

The situation is expected to further muddy today when a report by an Australian National University professor engaged by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority raises doubts about Airservices' conclusions.

Air traffic controllers and commercial pilots now worry that the private pilots may snatch an 11th-hour victory.

The Australian and International Pilots Association, the Australian Federation of Air Pilots and Civil Air yesterday jointly called for the board to reverse the reform.

The union has again said that the NAS 2b reforms increased the risk of a mid-air collision by boosting reliance on "see and avoid" to separate aircraft.

AIPA spokesman Richard Woodward said: "We call on the board of Airservices Australia to ... put the safety of Australia's travelling public first."

The Airservices board is under no obligation to act on the CASA report and can still proceed with the reversals, known as Option 3.

Airservices commissioned in-depth studies of the National Airspace System after admitting last November's NAS 2b reforms had been introduced without an adequate safety case.

The reforms widened the use of Class E airspace, in which instrument-flight rules aircraft are separated from each other but not from smaller, visual-flight rules planes.

The study found the introduction of en route E airspace did not significantly increase risk.

But it rang alarm bells about the use of Class E over airports, particularly where it had replaced the more restricted C-class space over regional aerodromes with towers.

A study of four airports picked as representative of these kinds of aerodromes found instances where the risks exceeded tolerable limits.

It showed that the risk of collision in C-class airspace in place before last November's changes was 78-81 per cent lower over three of the airports than it was under the reforms.

For example, Option 3 returns Class E airspace over those regional airports to Class C and extends Class C "steps" over bigger aerodromes so descending commercial aircraft need not pass through E airspace.

Airservices says the seven-month study was externally checked by Risk and Reliability Associates.

It also called on Access Economics to do a cost-benefit analysis before concluding the increase in risk did not outweigh the benefits.

Nonetheless, its conclusions have been under sustained attack by airspace reformer Dick Smith, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the Australian Sport Aviation Confederation and Recreational Aviation Australia.

They say the analysis is "dangerously flawed", exaggerates risk, maligns the skills of small pilots and fails to establish that the NAS reforms are unsafe.

They argue the model does not consider an increase in tower controller workload caused by the return to Class C airspace over regional towers, or a requirement that all aircraft flying in Class E airspace carry transponders that can be seen by airliner traffic collision avoidance systems.

"Much is made of the radar coverage in the US," their analysis says. "However, these comments ignore the fact that traffic densities in Australia are, very conservatively, less than one-quarter those in similar airspace in the US."

A US safety consultant and former high-ranking Federal Aviation Administration official brought in by the groups also raises doubts about the report's validity.

Anthony Broderick was particularly troubled by the lack of validation using available mid-air collision data and said the model's use of expert safety panels cast doubts on the results and their lack of bias.

"It is not beyond reasonable belief that these inaccuracies and bias, combined with the lack of consideration of TCAS, can lead the model to predict results that are, in fact, opposite of what is real," he said.

At least one airline, Virgin Blue, has backed the Airservices approach, and Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon last week urged the parties to find a solution.

Mr Dixon said: "A lot of people are taking very, very strong positions on this, there's a lot of politics behind it and I think it would be nice if we could sit down and get it done properly."

[privacy](#)   [terms](#)   © The Australian