

## Aviation

# Smaller players warn of 'oblivion'

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From: *The Australian*

May 16, 2014 12:00AM

**GENERAL aviation will follow other Australian industries into oblivion unless there is a radical revision of the local regulatory environment, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association of Australia has warned.**

In a submission to the federal government's inquiry into aviation safety, AOPA has said Australia's unique and complicated regulatory environment is strangling the small end of town. It said the result was that too often pilots, charter operators and maintenance people gave up because they believed it was "just too hard".

"Without a radical revision, it seems that GA will follow so many other Australian industries into oblivion, taking jobs, opportunities and skills with it," the submission said.

"The prospective GA pilot faces problems with access to airfields, high costs and a far from appealing ageing aircraft fleet.

"The aircraft owner faces frequently hostile airport owners, a shortage of licensed maintenance engineers, rising maintenance costs, increased paperwork and such uncertainty with both the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and airport owners that it is difficult to obtain finance to purchase new aircraft.

"In contrast, ultralight aircraft have prospered in a realistic regulatory environment."

AOPA calls for a sweep of the existing rules and the adoption of US-style regulations for general aviation similar to the New Zealand model.

It said attempting to patch up problems with Australia's system "was like renovating a house with rotten foundations".

Areas AOPA wants improved include the level of industry consultation by CASA, a move away from CASA's legalistic approach and more consistent enforcement. It also argued that aviation should be encouraged by CASA as part of its formal charter and that the regulator was fragmented and should act more coherently across the whole organisation.

AOPA also is highly critical of the declining number of airfields and difficulties in getting access.

It labelled the Aviation Security Identity Card as a "major inconvenience" that made no practical contribution to security and had become a device enabling routine obstruction of legitimate operations.

The organisation said expensive airport security fences and gates deterred and inconvenienced legitimate people but did little to deter anyone with malicious intent.

"The failure of the commonwealth government to enforce deeds of agreement with airport owners has seen many airports become unwelcoming or even downright hostile to GA aircraft, in the airport owners' efforts to seek profit from activities other than aviation," it said. "In particular, city airports effectively exclude GA and thus many people who would use this transport system cannot."

AOPA's submission is one of more than 270 received by the inquiry, with worries about CASA cited by chairman David Forsyth as a key concern.

These included concerns about the agency repeatedly changing direction about which overseas jurisdiction it would follow and the habitual use of unnecessarily complex terminology when dealing with the industry.

The committee hopes to have the report finalised by the end of the month. Industry groups are waiting for its findings and to see the government's response.