

Pilot licensing rules put aviation sector in a tailspin

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SMALLER aviation operators say they have been plunged into confusion by new pilot licensing rules that are hard to comprehend, not backed by education and contradictory in places.

Sections of the industry representing segments such as flight training, helicopter operations and aerial agriculture lobbied hard to have Civil Aviation Regulation Part 61 delayed because neither side was adequately prepared.

The Australian Aviation Associations Forum described Part 61 as “an over complicated and overweight document”, while the Australian Helicopter Industry Association has raised safety issues and called for a “safe, cost- effective and operationally sound” version of the new rules.

Appeals to Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss to intervene were unsuccessful, and less than a month after the rules were introduced, industry members say their worst fears have been realised.

Aerial Agricultural Association of Australia chief executive Phil Hurst said the lack of education was a big problem.

“It’s just appalling as in CASA has been caught with their pants down not having any educational material that’s easy to understand,” Mr Hurst said, noting the association had raised this issue in submissions in 2012 and 2013.

Mr Hurst said there was some advisory material but people were unable to find information unless they already knew the regulations and exactly what they were looking for. “I’ve been sitting on working groups since 1999 on this issue and I’m struggling to find stuff,” he said. “Imagine what some poor bastard with a flying training school’s going though. They’re looking at it and saying, how do I train?”

A veteran flying training operator with almost four decades in the industry said there was a lack of background, forms that didn’t yet exist and information that was still in draft form.

“The industry is crying,” the operator said.

He said the industry had been promised there would be no additional cost but there were “horrific costs involved”.

“There are government guidelines saying there should be the removal of red tape, that there should be stuff done in simple language,” he said.

“Everything’s been done in legal speak again that we can’t understand. There are actually things in different parts of the regs that contravene each other.”

AHIA president Peter Crook said rotary- and fixed-wing flying schools had told the association they could not understand the new regulations because of unclear and ambiguous wording.

Mr Crook said fixed-wing schools had calculated the cost of an endorsement on basic light twin-engine aircraft would rise by about \$1000 and a helicopter training organisation said they could add \$7000 to each of its endorsements because of the need to hire an approved testing officer.

The AHIA has questioned the move towards a European-influenced regulatory system given the US accident rate of 3.94 crashes per 100,000 hours compared to 10.8 accidents per 100,000 hours in Australia.

Another problem raised by both rotary- and fixed-wing operators is the amount of untested material in the new regulations that relates to the competencies pilots are required to demonstrate.

The AAAA's Mr Hurst said the association wrote many of the competencies in the new regulations for the aerial application rating and fire fighting endorsement. "But then they weren't actually tested," he said. "We expected there would be some quality assurance to say we've been out and we've tried to teach someone this sequence and we've found this problem or that problem."

Mr Hurst questioned whether the new rules were better than those they had replaced.

"I think the industry will give you a pretty firm view that this is just so over complicated for the task it does that we've actually gone backwards," he said.

"I'd challenge anyone to get their head around the 800 pages of regulations and clearly enunciate how all of those rules work together."

A CASA spokesman referred the operators to the authority's website and said it was doing dozens of face-to-face presentations on the changes.

In the latest CASA briefing, acting chief Terry Farquharson said the introduction of the new rules, which heralded a four-year transition period, had happened without the world coming to a halt. "In fact, rather than a welter of problems caused by the new regulations our main challenge has been keeping up with the number of people keen to move their licence over to the new regime as soon as possible," he said.

"CASA's licensing team are doing their best to keep up with the influx of applications but I do ask for your forbearance during this initial busy period and remind everyone that it is not essential to have a new Part 61 licence immediately."

Mr Farquharson said CASA had engaged research company Colmar Brunton to conduct an online survey during next month about its safety promotion activities and called on the industry to provide feedback.

Extracted from:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/pilot-licensing-rules-put-aviation-sector-in-a-tailspin/story-e6frg95x-1227070695141?nk=a4964d8d65ec111c2c8ecf3c09fc345d>

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