

# CASA under fire over handling of frequency changes for light pilots

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**CONVENERS of Australia's Regional Airspace and Procedures Advisory Committees have lodged a complaint over the air safety watchdog's handling of concerns about radio frequencies at some small airstrips.**

The conveners were unhappy with the way the Civil Aviation Safety Authority responded to their concerns and the fact they were unable to list it on the agenda of the Airspace and Aerodrome Consultative Forum.

The changes mean that aircraft operating into uncharted airports where there is no discrete common traffic advisory frequency must now use the VHF area frequency also used by en-route air traffic controllers to talk to airlines flying at high levels.

Members of the Victorian RAPAC became alarmed when they raised the issue in July and were told it was "operational" and not a suitable subject of discussion by the committee.

"At best, this announced change to what RAPACs can or cannot discuss was a rather cavalier way to treat a group of volunteers who, for decades, have given considerable amounts of their time and expertise to sort out airspace issues such as the very one in question," member Dick Gower said.

The RAPACs were also rebuffed in an attempt to get issues agreed by state conveners tabled at a meeting of the Airspace and Aerodrome Consultative Forum and were again told it was not appropriate, Mr Gower said.

"Having been frustrated at every attempt to highlight an important safety issue, the group of conveners have submitted their case to the Industry Complaints Commissioner," he said.

At the head of the conveners' list of concerns is the potential added frequency congestion and jamming on the area VHF due to broadcasts from a large number of non-charted aerodromes underneath commercial aircraft flight paths.

They have also raised concerns about the loss of alerted see-and-avoid procedures that were previously - available by monitoring the Multicom frequency and frequency conflicts where a non-charted aerodrome is located at 10 nautical miles or less from a charted aerodrome.

They say there could also be an unintentional creation of two area VHF frequencies for non-charted aerodromes located within 10 nautical miles of a VHF area frequency boundary.

CASA has issued new materials in attempt to clarify the situation and said that pilots who were aware of frequency conflict could report it to the appropriate RAPAC, which could request a change.

It also noted that it was relatively easy to request that an aerodrome be marked on a chart.

Former CASA chairman Dick Smith has also criticised the move, accused the air-safety regulator of using

airline passengers as “safety guinea pigs” and mishandling the changes.

Mr Smith this week wrote to the chairs at CASA and Airservices as well as to Infrastructure Department secretary Mike Mrdak and ATSB chief Martin Dolan warning of the safety problems of having visual flight rules aircraft making announcements on air traffic control separation frequencies.

Mr Smith said that the National Airspace System signed off by the Howard government was stopped halfway through and wound back. “I am sure you have all recently seen the terrible results of the home insulation scheme and the related commission of inquiry,” he said.

“I am fearful that a similar situation will occur when we have inevitable loss of life because the airspace system we are now using has not been proven anywhere else in the world.”

Mr Smith said the government should either move forward and follow the NAS system or return to the proven pre-1990 system of flight services officers, a move that he estimated would require the employment of an additional 700 people

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