

# The Australian CASA regulations ‘crippling aviators’

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Dick Smith with his Cessna Citation plane at Ballina Airport. *Source: News Corp Australia*

**Staff numbers at the aviation safety watchdog blew out 40 per cent in just seven years while the general aviation industry declined under a myriad of pressures.**

According to a study by businessman and aviator Dick Smith, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority has been employing ever more public servants to come up with and enforce increasingly severe rules that financially cripple smaller operators.

“They seem to be getting more and more people to write more rules for general aviation,” Mr Smith said. “It’s an industry in self-destruction mode.”

CASA denies the accusations, saying its workload has increased in part due to an increase in domestic airline activity of 28 per cent over the time period in question, with 47 million passengers carried in 2007 compared with 60 million in 2014.

Spokesman Peter Gibson also said a range of new safety programs, and the introduction of new responsibilities, had demanded more staff in recent years, but that those numbers were now declining.

Mr Gibson said the authority “has an appropriate level of staff numbers to manage the many aspects of the regulation of Australian aviation safety”.

“The Australian public rightly expects high levels of aviation safety and CASA is committed to delivering safe skies for all,” Mr Gibson said.

But small business aviators have told *The Australian* a series of very expensive regulatory programs introduced by CASA in recent years, including a new air navigation system and a compulsory inspection program for older Cessna light aircraft, is costing them dearly.

Total CASA staff rose from 621 in 2007 to 871 in 2014, an increase of 40 per cent, while the full-time equivalent increased from 612 to 853.

In the past year, total staff fell by 41 to 830, while full-time equivalent numbers fell by 42 to 811. In recent years private general aviation flying hours were steady, rising slightly from 222,700 hours in 2007 to 232,600 in 2012, the latest year for which figures are available.

But business general aviation flying hours between those years fell from 153,400 to 130,400, a decline of 15 per cent. Even harder hit, training flying hours plummeted from 455,400 in 2007 to 360,900 in 2012, a collapse of 21 per cent.

One of the key complaints of the general aviation industry is CASA's insistence on pressing ahead with the rollout of Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast, a new satellite GPS navigation system in which positioning data is relayed from aircraft to air traffic controllers via ground stations. Because it is being introduced in Australia several years ahead of the US, aircraft owners are being forced to pay between \$16,500 and \$125,000 for ADS-B installations because of first-of-type engineering costs and the fact that economies of scale have not yet been reached.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association has called for a moratorium on further compulsory ADS-B installations until a year after the program is completed in the US.

New CASA chairman Jeff Boyd told *The Australian* the program was too far down the track for a moratorium, with 83 per cent of affected aircraft already fitted with the equipment. But he said CASA was prepared to be flexible on a case-by-case basis.

For example, CASA would grant an exemption to a regional airline that in three or four months will renew some of its fleet and sell overseas or retire altogether some older aircraft, so that those departing aircraft do not have to fit ADS-B equipment, although the new ones will. Similarly, Mr Boyd said, CASA would consider individual applications for exemptions or extensions when it came to the Cessna compliance program known as Supplementary Inspection Documents