

Airport privatisation and CASA rules hurting businesses, owners and expert says

By [Jackson Vernon](#)



Photo: The owner of this aeroplane repair business at Bankstown Airport says the industry is under threat. (ABC News: Jackson Vernon)

There are growing concerns the general aviation industry in Australia is under threat from what has been described as a "perfect storm of problems".

Key points:

- Air Services Australia figures show small plane movements drop at smaller airports
- Expert says general aviation businesses suffering under CASA rules
- Infrastructure Minister Darren Chester defends the Bankstown Airport privatisation

Dave Pyett, who has run an aeroplane repair business at Bankstown Airport since 1993, said the problems began emerging when the airport was sold off by the federal government in 2003.

"[In] 1993 it was about \$23,000 a year for this hangar; [a] World War II shed basically with no improvements, all the improvements we've paid for," he said.

"They've bunged the rent up and now we're paying \$110,000 a year for the rent on this place now.

"That's where our money is going — down the dunny."

Figures from Air Services Australia show that small plane movements at the airport have fallen about 20 per cent in the past 10 years.

The falls are even higher at airports across Australia, including a 40 per cent decline at Jandakot Airport in Western Australia and Archerfield Airport in Queensland.

CASA accused of over regulation

Aeroplane Owners and Pilots Association executive director Benjamin Morgan said airports are suffering from privatisation.

"We have seen a large scale decline in the number of flying, training, maintenance, charter support industries at this aerodrome," he said

"There are thousands of people who have lost their jobs and have been driven into bankruptcy as a result of airport privatisation."

Adjunct Professor David Forsyth, who teaches aviation studies at the University of NSW, said general aviation businesses are suffering under rules governed by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA).

He submitted a report to the federal government in 2014, in which he criticised CASA's "hard-line philosophy".

"In Australia our aviation regulations are too prescriptive, they go down to a level of detail that is not common in other jurisdictions around the world," he said.

"A large part of the recommendations was to do with the regulatory suite to amend the Australian regulations so that they were ... more harmonised with the rest of the world and that they were not so prescriptive."

But Mr Forsyth said most of the recommendations have not been implemented.

"If things don't improve and the regulator doesn't establish that trust and make some changes to the way it regulates... industries in general aviation will continue to move to New Zealand and to other countries rather than be developed in Australia."

Minister defends privatisation of airport

A CASA spokeswoman rejected that the recommendations are not being implemented.

"CASA has made significant progress and is working towards finalising the implementation of these recommendations by the end of the year," she said.

"CASA does not accept that the reduction in general aviation activity can solely be attributed to safety regulations or actions by CASA.

"There are many economic, social and technological factors impacting on the general aviation industry."



Photo: Flight movements at Jandakot Airport in WA have fallen by 40 per cent (ABC)

A spokesman for Bankstown Airport moved to allay concerns about aviation at the site.

"All federal leased airports are required by their lease with the Commonwealth to operate the airport as an airport," he said.

"Over the years there have been some tenants that have left the airport, through retirement, industry rationalisation, business failure post-GFC or seeking an environment with less compliance issues."

A spokeswoman for Infrastructure Minister Darren Chester has defended the privatisation.

"Non-aeronautical land use and commercial activity is necessary to allow airport lease holders to provide the significant investment necessary to maintain and grow airport and aviation infrastructure, she said.

"This investment would not have been possible if these airports remained in Government control or, if Government control was to have been maintained, without changes in the arrangements between the Government and airport users to reflect the market value of airport activity."