

THE AUSTRALIAN^{🇦🇺} BUSINESS REVIEW

Red tape, cost leaves pilots ‘flying blind’ in cloud

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- [Ean Higgins](#)



Reporter



Dick Smith says it costs much more to get an instrument rating in Australia than in the US.

The time and money spent on complying with Australia’s aviation regulations is resulting in few pilots being trained and certified to fly in clouds, a situation aviator and businessman Dick Smith says led to the death of Malcolm Turnbull’s father and is still taking lives today.

The Australian can reveal, based on material obtained by Mr Smith from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the US Federal Aviation Administration, that while 65 per cent of eligible pilots in the US hold an instrument rating to fly without a natural horizon, the comparable figure in Australia is only 16 per cent.

Mr Smith claims the difference in the figures reflects the much higher expense and amount of red tape in getting and maintaining an instrument rating in Australia compared to the US.

An instrument rating allows pilots to fly through clouds, having been trained to do so safely, relying on artificial horizons and other instruments for orientation.

In the US, once obtained, the instrument rating applies indefinitely and there are no regular proficiency checks provided the pilot remains “current”, such as by flying six instrument approach procedures in the previous six months.

In Australia, pilots with a full instrument rating, which applies to commercial pilots and allows a full range of flying in cloud conditions, must undertake an annual instrument proficiency check.

CASA also offers a “private instrument rating”, which allows for flying in cloud in a narrower set of situations, mainly to deal with unexpected bad weather. Pilots are required to pass a proficiency check every two years.

The cost of the regular proficiency check — adding up the expenses of the examiner, the flight itself, and for non-owners aircraft rental — can amount to thousands of dollars, which Mr Smith says is a big disincentive to get the instrument rating in the first place.

The result, Mr Smith says, is that few Australian pilots can safely fly in clouds if forced to do so, often leaving “scud running” — where pilots fly low below clouds through valleys — the only alternative.

Mr Smith has written what he describes as a “controversial” letter to Mr Turnbull, saying: “You lost your father in a small plane accident where the private pilot lost control of an aircraft where the visual horizon was lost.”

On November 11, 1982, Bruce Turnbull was one of three passengers on a flight from Scone in the NSW Hunter Valley to Casino in the northeast of the state.

The pilot reported by radio that he had run into a bit of “muck”, before turning back to Scone in a bid to get out of clouds.

The aircraft was spotted by locals descending steeply out of a low cloud base, at which point its nose rose briefly before its left wing tore off and it crashed.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau report on the crash ruled out pre-existing mechanical faults. It noted the pilot did not hold an instrument rating, and continued the visual rules flight into adverse weather.

“The pilot probably experienced spatial disorientation while flying in cloud, resulting in loss of control of the aircraft,” the ATSB report said. It said the aircraft exceeded its design strength when the pilot tried to pull out. Mr Smith told *The Australian* that pilots who were not instrument-trained lost orientation almost immediately inside a cloud.

“If you have not been trained to fly without a horizon, in one or two minutes you will probably die,” Mr Smith said.

Instrument flying instruction teaches pilots to “disregard what your senses tell you and watch the instruments”.

A CASA spokeswoman said pilots in Australia needed to conduct flights in instrument meteorological conditions less often than in the US, mainly due to the good weather conditions, and therefore, they undertake instrument flying less frequently.

“CASA has already commenced the post-implementation review of the new pilot licensing regulations,” she said.

“Consideration will be given to the effectiveness of the instrument rating and the private instrument flight rules rating.”

Extracted from:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/red-tape-cost-leaves-pilots-flying-blind-in-cloud/news-story/c9cdbf03888f51be1e24fc7b0ec22080>

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