

# Royal Newcastle Aero Club in mourning after Woodville crash

• Phoebe Moloney



WRECKAGE: Police rescue vehicle at the property in Woodville where emergency services found the aircraft wreckage on Saturday afternoon. Picture: Marina Neil

**The president of the Royal Newcastle Aero Club says the organisation, based at Maitland Airport, has sustained "a great loss" after two of its longstanding members died in a microlight aircraft crash on Saturday.**

"It's a very sad occasion," President John Tate said. "They were highly-respected members and competent pilots."

Police are investigating the circumstances surrounding the crash after emergency services personnel found an aircraft wreckage, along with the bodies of a 44-year-old man and a 71-year-old man, at a property in Woodville, north of Maitland, on Saturday afternoon.

Emergency services had responded to reports of an aircraft spiraling to the ground.

The Sports Aviation Federation of Australia, a national body that administrates microlights, hang gliding and paragliding, is assisting police with their investigation. SAFA's safety management officer, Iain Clarke, said an expert from the Federation traveled to help Port Stephens Hunter police on Sunday.

"We provide police with knowledge on the aircraft, to go and look at the aircraft and see if there is anything out of the ordinary," Mr Clarke said.

He described the type of vehicle involved, a weight-shifting microlight, as "quite safe".

"It's basically a hang glider wing with a fuselage attached below it and that fuselage contains the seating for a pilot and a passenger and wheels," Mr Clarke said.

He confirmed the pilot of the aircraft, the 44-year-old man, was a member of SAFA.

"Our thoughts are with the families involved," Mr Clarke said.

Mr Tate said the two men were longstanding friends and had hired the club's microlight aircraft or "trike" on Saturday. They took off from Maitland Airport.

Both men held private pilot licences, Mr Tate said. The younger man had a "love" of trikes, he said, and flew "fairly regularly".

"As far as I am aware they went for a recreational flight, which they had done many times," Mr Tate said.

"Knowing both of them they would have been flying in a manner that was conducive to safety. The times I have seen them flying they've always been exemplary.

"Safety is something that we, as a club, pay attention to and maintain and respect. And there's no reason why that wouldn't have been the case on this occasion," he said.

Mr Tate said he had been in contact with the mens' families.

Officers have asked that anyone with information about the incident contact Maitland Police Station on 4934 0311 or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000

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