



Quarterly Report
January – March 2017

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1 Introduction

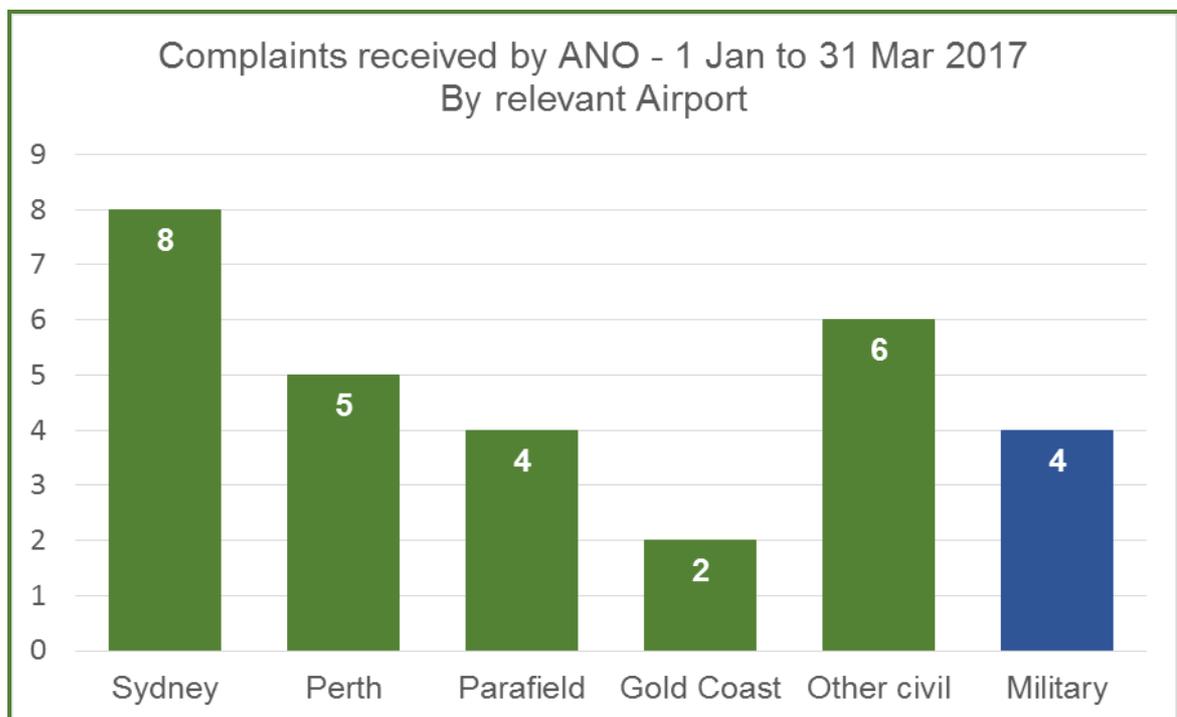
- 1.1 This report includes complaint statistics and a summary of ANO activities during the January to March 2017 quarter. It is structured around the three key functions of the ANO, these being the review and monitoring of Airservices Australia's and the Department of Defence's:
- a. complaint handling;
 - b. community consultation processes; and
 - c. provision of information about aircraft noise.

2 Overview

- 2.1 During the quarter, Mr Ron Brent concluded his second term as Aircraft Noise Ombudsman, and Ms Narelle Bell commenced in the role on 8 February 2017. It was a smooth transition with the rest of the ANO team remaining to support the new Ombudsman and ensure business as usual.
- 2.2 Since his start in September 2010 as Australia's first Aircraft Noise Ombudsman, Mr Brent leaves a proud legacy. During his tenure, the ANO office has overseen significant improvements in complaint handling by Airservices, improved information provision and fostered a more effective nuanced discussion in the industry's engagement with communities about aircraft noise. Some of the important noise improvement initiatives implemented around the country were the direct result of the ANO's independent investigation and follow-through. Extension of the ANO charter in 2015 to encompass Defence's management of aircraft noise issues reflects a recognition of the value placed on the ANO's contribution in this field.
- 2.3 From the start of January to the end of March, the ANO received a total of 29 complaints, including four about Defence's management of aircraft noise issues. These numbers are in line with the long-term trend. Almost half of the complaints in the civilian space related to Sydney Airport noise, with Perth, Parafield and Gold Coast Airports all having more than one complaint to the ANO in the period.
- 2.4 The ANO was hopeful that more progress would have been made by Defence in response to its outstanding ANO recommendations. Defence has three outstanding recommendations from the 2015 Super Hornet Review. The ANO continues to await evidence in support of the closure of two of these recommendations. The third relates to an online complaint lodgement capability, for which Defence is still investigating options.
- 2.5 The ANO's *Review of Defence's Aircraft Noise Complaint Handling System*, was submitted to Defence in November 2016 and made seven recommendations, all of which were accepted by Defence. As yet, Defence has not provided any progress update against these recommendations.
- 2.6 **Attachment 2** provides a summary of progress against all outstanding recommendations.

3 Complaint handling

- 3.1 During the quarter the ANO received 29 new complaints, four of which related to Defence aircraft noise management. This is line with the long-term average for the number of complaints received. At the end of the quarter, nine complaints remain open. Twenty-seven complaints were closed in the quarter, with nine having been reviewed in detail and 18 referred back to the agency for a direct response.
- 3.2 The graph below shows complaints received by the ANO during the quarter by relevant airport. It can be useful to consider which airport a complaint relates to because that may help to identify any unusual or unexpected increase in a particular location. This might, in turn, indicate unforeseen impacts in an area, lead to potential improvement opportunities or show that it is merely coincidental.
- 3.3 By way of example, it is unusual for the ANO to receive more than one or two complaints in one quarter relating to Parafield Airport. Having received four, three of which were in January, the ANO looked into the complaints further. It turned out that two complainants had not contacted Airservices initially, and so were referred to Airservices for a direct response. The other two complaints were about Airservices' response, which had advised there were no practical options identified to reduce the noise impacts from circuit training in the short to medium term. The ANO was satisfied that Airservices had properly handled these complaints. While the complainants were disappointed, the ANO supports Airservices' practice of being honest about the prospects of change so that complainants may choose how they wish to manage the noise issues they are facing.



3.4 In the previous graph, the military complaints are grouped because no individual RAAF Base had more than one complaint. Also of note is that one military complaint and two of the ‘other civil’ complaints were not specific to the operations from any one particular airport. In these cases, the complainant was affected by overflights of their property that were not specific to any airport.

3.5 Complaint statistics for the quarter are summarised at **Attachment 1**.

Seeking noise improvement opportunities

3.6 In addition to reviewing Airservices’ or Defence’s handling of an aircraft noise issue, ANO investigations into complaints also look for the potential to improve noise outcomes. Generally there are very few practical opportunities for change as Airservices and Defence have previously identified and implemented available change opportunities over time. However, these rare chances for noise improvement present a highly effective way for Airservices or Defence to show the community that the agency takes aircraft noise management seriously and is prepared to seize opportunities for improvement whenever reasonably possible.

3.7 Table 1 (below) reports on the noise improvement opportunities that the ANO continues to pursue with Airservices and Defence.

Table 1: Noise improvement opportunities

Complaint received by ANO	Description of initiative	Current status
Mar 2016	Sydney: adjustment to flight paths over water during curfew hours	The ANO asked Airservices to consider if a better noise outcome can be achieved for coastal residents south of Sydney Airport affected by flights departing during the curfew. Following ANO analysis and feedback, Airservices has re-visited its initial investigation into the feasibility of changing to the standard instrument departure. Airservices considers a change may now be possible and has commenced the formal change process, including detailed procedure design, necessary assessments and relevant consultation. Should this all proceed smoothly, a change may be introduced near to the end of this year that will potentially benefit thousands of coastal Sydney residents.
Nov 2016	Pallarenda: ATC procedure changes to reduce overflight of residential areas	The ANO is pursuing with Defence a possible noise improvement for residences in the Pallarenda area north of RAAF Base Townsville. The ANO has asked Defence to give detailed consideration to options to improve compliance with existing procedures aimed at minimising the impacts of aircraft overflights by both civilian and military aircraft departing Townsville Airport to the north. Defence has undertaken to review a number options, however there has been some delay in finalising a response, recently exacerbated by activities associated with Defence’s response to Tropical Cyclone Debbie in northern Australia. The ANO looks forward to this matter receiving more attention in the coming quarter.

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Complaint received by ANO	Description of initiative	Current status
Feb 2017	Brisbane: adjustment to arrival flight path to reduce overflight of residential areas	Following a suggestion from a resident of Clear Mountain (north of Brisbane Airport), the ANO has asked Airservices to give consideration to a possible noise improvement. The suggestion is that moving the Standard Terminal Arrival Route from the north-west to Brisbane Airport's main runway to approach from further west would potentially result in a significant reduction in the number of residential areas overflowed. Airservices is investigating the feasibility of this proposal, including giving close consideration to the possible effect on other previously not overflowed residences.

Seeking improvements in aircraft noise complaint handling

3.8 The ANO was pleased to finalise the *Review of Defence's Aircraft Noise Complaint Handling System*, which was submitted to Defence in November 2016. Defence accepted all recommendations. Unfortunately, Defence has not yet presented any evidence that any of the recommendations have been actioned. The ANO is disappointed with this apparent lack of progress and encourages Defence to assign accountability for seeing through the necessary reforms to enhance its complaint handling.

4 Consultation

4.1 The ANO office attended a number of industry and community consultative meetings during the quarter. This activity supports the ANO's role of monitoring Airservices' and Defence's consultation and information provision. It also fosters a broader understanding and awareness of aircraft noise management issues. The meetings this quarter were largely focussed on introducing the new Aircraft Noise Ombudsman and developing relationships. Meetings attended included:

- Airservices' Board, Chief Executive Officer, Executive General Manager Air Navigation Services, and key staff involved in aircraft noise management;
- Chief of Air Force, and key Defence staff involved in aircraft noise management;
- Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, and various branch heads;
- Australian Airports Association Board and senior executive staff;
- Australian Mayoral Aviation Council Secretary;
- Representatives of Canberra, Perth, Sydney and Brisbane Airports;
- Sydney Airport Community Forum (SACF) and separately with SACF community representatives;
- Brisbane Community Aviation Consultation Group;
- Mr Ben Morton MP;
- Government Aviation Complaint Handling Forum; and
- International Civil Aviation Organisation, Committee for Aviation Environmental Protection - Working Group on aircraft noise.

- 4.2 The ANO is closely monitoring Airservices' new community engagement arrangements following its internal reform program, *Accelerate*. It is critical that Airservices engages effectively with communities affected and potentially affected by aircraft noise, both through and following this period of change.
- 4.3 Concerns about Airservices' changed approach to community engagement have been expressed to the ANO by a variety of individuals, including the Chairs of some Community Aviation Consultation Groups (CACGs), community representatives, airports and others affected by this issue. The concerns are largely about the quality of information being provided following the devolution of responsibility for Airservices' engagement through Community Aviation Consultation Groups to local Air Traffic Managers. This is in contrast with the pre-*Accelerate* practice of community engagement being led by a centralised skilled community relations team. Uncertainty persists about how Airservices is managing community engagement with CACGs.
- 4.4 Effective community engagement is essential. It requires a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy with clear values, targets and accountabilities. Government agencies' and industry's recognition of the importance of effective community engagement is growing. This is perhaps illustrated by the fact that demand for effective skills training is fast outstripping supply by reputable providers such as the International Association for Public Participation. Community engagement, especially at open forums, is not for the uninitiated. It requires skill and institutional support. The ANO will attend many of the CACG meetings and other Airservices' engagement activities in the next six months or so. The ANO will closely monitor, and potentially identify opportunities for improving, the quality of Airservices' community engagement. Public updates on this issue will be provided through quarterly reports.

5 Information Provision

- 5.1 In reviewing complaints it is appropriate to consider not only the specific issues raised, but also whether the complaint points to opportunities for improving public information about aircraft noise issues. Led by the Noise Complaints and Information Service, Airservices is proactive in developing standardised explanations of issues arising for use in its responses and in material designed for the website and other public presentations. When the ANO receives a complaint, or otherwise has the opportunity to assess Airservices' public information about an issue, enhancing information provision is a key consideration. As appropriate, feedback is provided to the agency.
- 5.2 The ANO is pleased to see the effort Airservices puts into maintaining up-to-date information about aviation activities (both civil and military) on its Aircraft Noise News web-page that might affect the aircraft noise experiences across the country. It is also clear that Defence issues regular media releases about upcoming exercises and activities. However there is no apparent single location on the Defence website for the public to review this information. Information provision through the Defence website is an area identified in the ANO's Complaints System Review as warranting some focussed attention (see Recommendations 2 and 3).

6 Closing remarks

- 6.1 Since commencing as the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman on 8 February, I have spent much of my time meeting with key people and building my knowledge of the aviation sector and specifically aircraft noise issues. In addition to a generous handover from Mr Ron Brent, I have been welcomed and well supported by the small but dynamic ANO team. I acknowledge their long careers in aviation, their skills developed over the last six years with the ANO and their commitment to best practice in aircraft noise management. They are the mainstay of the ANO.
- 6.2 I have been impressed by the range of complex issues that arise in aircraft noise management and how multi-factorial each issue can be. There are no simple answers to questions. Aviation is a highly technical field, sometimes with a language of its own, and I can see opportunities for improving 'translation' of complex, technical issues to help better match community expectations with community experiences of aircraft noise.
- 6.3 While I may be new to aviation and aircraft noise, I am not new to the ways in which government and agency decision-making can affect ordinary people in their daily lives. I am well acquainted with the consequences of agencies' failure to properly engage with affected communities.
- 6.4 For any Ombudsman, the keys to delivering effective outcomes are independence, impartiality and balance. I hope to continue to develop relationships in this sphere that make for frank exchanges, productive co-operation and continuous improvement. I look forward to this important challenge and to the work ahead.



Narelle Bell
Aircraft Noise Ombudsman
12 April 2017

Attachment 1 Complaint Statistics

The following tables summarise the complaint statistics both for the quarter.

AIRSERVICES	Jan 2017	Feb 2017	Mar 2017	Total for quarter
Complaints received:	10	11	4	25
Complaints closed:	12	7	5	24
Total complaints closed - not reviewed:	9	4	2	15
Complainant did not provide further information	0	0	0	0
Outside charter scope	0	0	0	0
Referred to Airservices to respond directly	9	4	2	15
Total complaints closed - reviewed:	3	3	3	9
No change possible - explanation provided	3	3	3	9
Change adopted by Airservices Australia	0	0	0	0
Change adopted by Airport operator	0	0	0	0
Change adopted by Aircraft operator	0	0	0	0

DEFENCE	Jan 2017	Feb 2017	Mar 2017	Total for quarter
Complaints received:	0	0	4	4
Complaints closed:	0	0	3	3
Total complaints closed - not reviewed:	0	0	3	3
Complainant did not provide further information	0	0	0	0
Outside charter scope	0	0	0	0
Referred to Defence to respond directly	0	0	3	3
Total complaints closed - reviewed:	0	0	0	0
No change possible - explanation provided	0	0	0	0
Change adopted by Defence	0	0	0	0

	Airservices	Defence	Total
Complaints carried forward on 1 Jan	6	1	7
Complaints received	25	4	29
Complaints closed	24	3	27
Complaints open at 1 April	7	2	9

Attachment 2 Outstanding ANO recommendations

The following tables set out the status of outstanding recommendations made by the ANO and the ANO's assessment of action against each. Recommendations that were previously reported as complete have been removed.

Super Hornet Review (August 2015)

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
Recommendation 1 – Defence should adopt appropriate record management practices to ensure identified gaps in record-keeping are addressed.	<u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised it has addressed this recommendation. ANO is seeking evidence to support Defence advice.
Recommendation 6 – Defence should review the reporting requirements in the Noise Management Plan and establish systems to ensure adherence to the requirements.	<u>Ongoing</u> – ANO has reviewed Defence's systems and is seeking supporting data to confirm reporting requirements are adhered to.
Recommendation 10 – Defence should expedite establishment of an online complaint lodgement capability.	<u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that work on this recommendation is ongoing, with intentions to implement a trial of the form in Q2 2017.

Defence Complaints System Review (November 2016)

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
Recommendation 1 – Defence should expand the focus of complaint investigation beyond compliance checking to also identify and pursue opportunities for noise improvements, improved community engagement and better public information.	<u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.
Recommendation 2 – To help in managing complainant expectations, Defence should improve the public information about the complaints process to address the information requirements outlined in the Standard and as identified within the report.	<u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.
Recommendation 3 – Defence should review the Defence Aircraft Noise web information and, taking account of comments in this report, make improvements to information provision, presentation and functionality.	<u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.

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Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<p>Recommendation 4 – To support the timely release of written responses, Defence should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. document the procedures to be followed in the event of written complaints (whether received through post, email or an online form), ensuring such procedures incorporate a timely acknowledgement of the complaint b. streamline any necessary review and approval processes for written responses to complaints c. consider the provision of training and support material for staff that will be responding to complaints, in particular via email following the introduction of electronic complaint submission. 	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5 – Defence should adhere to its existing requirements for complaint recording and tracking.</p>	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6 – Defence should update its localised recording systems and the OA39 form as appropriate to incorporate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Closing date b. A place to record consideration of noise improvement opportunities, community engagement improvements and public information improvements c. Undertakings or follow up action required (including who is accountable for delivery). d. A mechanism for tracking any undertakings or follow up actions through to completion. 	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7 – Defence should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ensure that complaints not readily ascribed to a base are managed as effectively as other complaints b. share data, experience and learnings across bases to maximise noise improvement opportunities and enhance complaint management across Defence. 	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Defence has advised that it will assign an accountable officer and resources accordingly.</p>