



Quarterly Report  
January-March 2019

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## 1 Introduction

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- 1.1 This report includes complaint statistics and a summary of ANO activities during the January to March 2019 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.

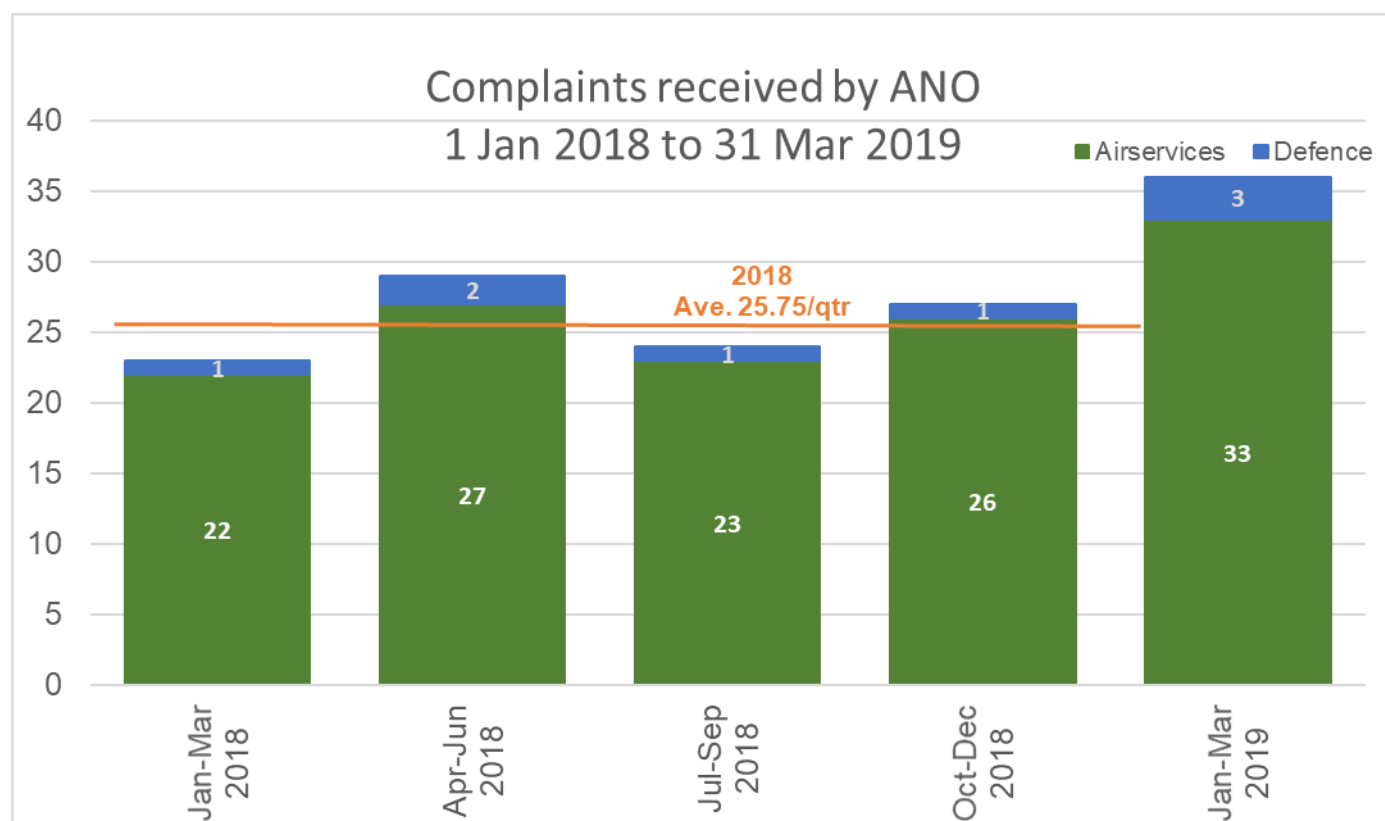
## 2 Overview

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- 2.1 From the start of January to the end of March 2019, the ANO received a total of 36 complaints, including three about Defence's management of aircraft noise issues. **Attachment 1** provides detailed complaint statistics for the quarter.
- 2.2 Airservices has finalised its Hobart airspace design review, releasing its final design at the end of March. We have been observing the process closely as well as receiving feedback directly by way of complaints or comments from some members of the community. Airservices has committed significant resources to a much more robust design process that recognised the need for and the value of consulting with the community, as well as more broadly with other stakeholders. Although not everyone will be happy with Airservices' final decision, in general we were pleased to see that Airservices was able to take on board much of the feedback it received through its consultation process and to respond with changes to its preferred design, recognising and addressing the feedback received. However, there remain some key aspects of its methodology and decision-making processes during the review that could be improved or benefit from better explanation. These are matters we continue to pursue with Airservices, either through complaint reviews or through the monitoring of outstanding recommendations from our *Investigation into complaints about the introduction of new flight paths in Hobart (April 2018)*.
- 2.3 It was also pleasing to close a further recommendation this quarter, reflecting Airservices' appointment of an experienced community engagement specialist to the position of Group and Community Engagement Manager (rec 5).
- 2.4 Defence is still working to address the final recommendation from our *Review of Defence's Aircraft Noise Complaints Management System (November 2016)*, which is aimed at improving the aircraft noise information available through its website. We have also been approved by the Department of the Environment and Energy to undertake a second compliance audit of Defence's *Australian Super Hornet Flying Operations, RAAF Base Amberley Project*, which will be a key focus over the next two months.
- 2.5 **Attachment 2** provides a summary of action on all outstanding recommendations from both of the Reviews referred to above.

### 3 Complaint handling

- 3.1 During the quarter the ANO received 36 new complaints, three of which related to Defence's aircraft noise management. This is well above the quarterly average of the past calendar year, as shown in the graph below.



- 3.2 One area of notable increase was in complaints about Airservices' handling of complaints about Parafield Airport, with seven complaints from residents in the area during this quarter. Airservices has limited powers in regard to the circuit training activity that is of most concern and so complainants sought a review by the ANO because Airservices was unable to take any action beyond provision of information. The ANO's investigations found that Airservices is generally responding with clear explanations about how aircraft operate at Parafield Airport, where these operations occur in relation to the complainant's home, what the regulatory framework is and the limits of Airservices' role. Airservices provides an honest assessment of the unlikelihood of it pursuing any improvement to reduce the noise impacts the complainant is experiencing. Our view is that every complaint should be taken seriously and each practical and feasible opportunity for improvement should be pursued. However, unfortunately, there are not always feasible options available for Airservices to change the way aircraft operate in an area.

- 3.3 Twenty four complaints were closed during the quarter, of which 12 were reviewed in detail and ten were referred back to the relevant agency for a direct response. One complaint led to a change being adopted by Defence to improve its complaint handling record-keeping and communications with complainants.

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

## Noise improvement opportunities

- 3.5 Complaints reviewed by the ANO sometimes raise opportunities to improve noise outcomes. Sometimes a complainant will suggest a particular change which may in turn prompt consideration of additional options for improved outcomes. Generally, the practical opportunities for change arising from complaints received by the ANO are limited. This is due to it commonly being the case that there are no feasible, practical and safe alternatives available. In addition, Airservices and Defence may have already identified and implemented the available change opportunities.
- 3.6 However, even when no noise improvement can be achieved, the reflection on alternatives and provision of detailed and logical reasons for decisions not to pursue one or all of the alternatives considered promotes good decision-making. Occasionally, it highlights an opportunity that has not been fully explored.
- 3.7 The table below reports on the noise improvement opportunities that the ANO continues to pursue with Airservices, arising from ANO reviews of complaints about the agency's complaint handling.

Complaint received by ANO	Description of initiative	Current status
June 2017	Perth: changes to northern smart tracking approach path to reduce noise impacts for residents	<p>This suggestion was first raised by residents prior to the new path being introduced in Sept 2015, and Airservices undertook to look at the issue as part of an upcoming post-implementation review.</p> <p>Since that time, the ANO has continued to seek updates from Airservices and was advised in early 2018 that Airservices' noise modelling and a targeted environmental assessment indicated its proposed modification to the smart tracking approach would provide the best overall aircraft noise outcome. However it elected to not pursue the change immediately, pending Perth Airport's finalisation of its Master Development Plan for the new parallel runway. Airservices advised that this was "to enable a proper assessment of the impact of the MDP, and its associated new runway flight paths, on the proposed Smart Tracking approach modification." This approach, Airservices advised, "ensures the proposed modification is not completed in isolation from the proposed flight paths for the new runway in Perth, potentially resulting in a requirement to further modify the Smart Tracking approach and unnecessarily burdening the community".</p> <p>The ANO will seek further information and continue to seek updates until a final decision is made.</p>
June 2017	Wagga Wagga: changes to circuit operations	<p>The ANO received a complaint about Airservices not being able to pursue any changes to reduce the noise impacts of frequent circuit training flights over residential areas to the north of the airfield. The ANO sought advice from the airport operator, Wagga Wagga Council, about whether the sparsely populated area to the south could be used more often, when practical. The Council undertook to consider a change to the circuit direction and is developing a <i>Fly Friendly</i> procedure to accommodate this, subject to final approvals.</p> <p>The ANO continues to monitor this case until a decision is reached.</p>

## 4 Consultation and Information Provision

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- 4.1 Airservices published its *Hobart Airspace Design Review – Proposed Design Feedback Consultation Summary Report* in late February 2019, which was prepared by its consultant, Tania Parkes Consulting (TPC). The report presents as providing a summary of feedback gathered through the engagement activities that sought community views. Some concerns have been expressed by some members of the community about the report being more than an objective factual summary because it appears to include analysis, judgements and commentary that reflect the consultant's views and, in some instances, offers counter-argument to the feedback. Concern was also expressed about the report presenting detailed summaries of the on-site consultation sessions, but not presenting the same level of detail about the feedback received through other channels such as telephone calls and written submissions. It did state that the feedback from 277 submissions was broadly consistent with that received from on-site sessions, but also stated that it differed considerably in relation to a number of issues.
- 4.2 While the concept of publishing a de-identified summary of feedback received is sound, there is a risk of unintended bias or selectivity in decisions about what should be included as relevant. When key themes are extracted and presented as the organising principle for reporting and summary, these will rely to some extent on the author's subjective interpretation. The structure of the TPC report makes it difficult to see clear links from the feedback detailed and the conclusions made about the key themes and, for example, what TPC describes as being 'on balance' a particular preference overall within the community. In our ongoing monitoring of consultation activities, and in response to specific complaints received, the ANO will consider and report to the Board on any opportunities for improving future feedback summary presentations.
- 4.3 There are also some key aspects of Airservices' methodology and decision-making processes during the Hobart Airspace Review that could be improved. In particular, the reasons for certain approaches, actions or decisions need better explanation. These (where related to aircraft noise management) are matters we continue to pursue with Airservices, either through complaint reviews or through the monitoring of outstanding recommendations from our *Investigation into complaints about the introduction of new flight paths in Hobart (April 2018)*. Key concerns include the Environmental Assessment methodology, the lack of documentation to support Airservices' comparative assessment which led to the decision to preference the Eastern approach over the Western approach, and a lack of clarity about the feasibility of the Western approach (or some part of the approach or an amended model of the approach). These and other matters arising from Hobart and other consultation initiatives that Airservices is pursuing will continue to be reviewed and monitored, and where appropriate, the ANO will make reports and recommendations to the Airservices Board.

4.4 Overall, in terms of Hobart, we have been pleased to see that Airservices committed significant resources to a much more robust flight path design process that recognised the need for and the value of consulting with the community, as well as more broadly with other stakeholders. We are also aware that Airservices has numerous other flight path change projects across the country and we will continue to monitor and report to the Board on the effectiveness of Airservices' community consultation processes and information provision relating to aircraft noise. Much progress has been made but continuous improvement is key. The considerable advances made by Airservices since it introduced flight path changes in Hobart in September 2017 with little or no consultation with the community, and with serious reputational and resources consequences, must continue to be built on and developed. Otherwise, the benefits of progress to date will gradually diminish.

## 5 Closing remarks

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As with the preceding quarter, the start of this year has continued to be a time of change and improvement in aircraft noise management and community engagement by Airservices. The progress that has been made will continue to serve Airservices well only if it continues to build on the arduous work done so far. Stagnation will undo the gains made. Continuous improvement is key.

This next reporting period will involve greater attention on Defence as we undertake the second compliance audit against its conditions of approval for the Super Hornets at Amberley. We have a new team member starting next month and this will help to restore our capacity to better respond to our workload demands and keep abreast of Airservices' consultation initiatives in places other than Hobart.



Narelle Bell  
Aircraft Noise Ombudsman  
25 April 2019

## Attachment 1 Complaint Statistics

The following tables summarise the complaint statistics for the quarter.

<b>AIRSERVICES</b>	<b>Jan 2019</b>	<b>Feb 2019</b>	<b>Mar 2019</b>	<b>Total for quarter</b>
Complaints received:	8	9	16	<b>33</b>
Complaints closed:	4	12	7	<b>23</b>
<b>Total complaints closed - not reviewed:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
Complainant did not provide further information	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Outside charter scope	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Referred to Airservices to respond directly	2	5	3	<b>10</b>
<b>Total complaints closed - reviewed:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>
No change possible - explanation provided	2	5	4	<b>9</b>
Change adopted by Airservices Australia	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Change adopted by Airport operator	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Change adopted by Aircraft operator	0	0	0	<b>0</b>

<b>DEFENCE</b>	<b>Jan 2019</b>	<b>Feb 2019</b>	<b>Mar 2019</b>	<b>Total for quarter</b>
Complaints received:	1	0	2	<b>3</b>
Complaints closed:	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total complaints closed - not reviewed:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Complainant did not provide further information	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Outside charter scope	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Referred to Defence to respond directly	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total complaints closed - reviewed:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
No change possible - explanation provided	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Change adopted by Defence	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

	<b>Airservices</b>	<b>Defence</b>	<b>Total</b>
Complaints carried forward on 1 Jan 2019	16	0	<b>16</b>
Complaints received	33	3	<b>36</b>
Complaints closed	23	1	<b>24</b>
Complaints open at 1 Apr 2019	26	2	<b>28</b>



## Attachment 2 Outstanding ANO recommendations

The following table sets 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.

### Defence Complaints System Review (November 2016)

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<b>Recommendation 3</b> – 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 has made some changes already, including launching its online complaint form. Defence is also reviewing the web information to address the issues identified in the review.

### Airservices - Investigation into complaints about the introduction of new flight paths in Hobart (April 2018)

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<b>Recommendation 2:</b> Airservices should review its environmental assessment criteria to ensure they are appropriate as a quantitative measure for analysis against the EPBC Act requirements and for assessment of social impact.	<u>Ongoing</u> – services has advised that its actions to address this recommendation are 'in progress', including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is reviewing its environmental assessment referral criteria to ensure it is appropriate and aligned to the EPBC Act requirements and when complete will seek the advice of the Department of Environment. This review will be completed by June 2019;</li> <li>- it is also developing social impact criteria for aircraft noise management, to be completed by June 2019.</li> </ul>

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> Airservices should ensure that its additional analysis of social impact to form part of the Environmental Assessment:</p> <p>(a) includes a clearly defined purpose;</p> <p>(b) includes explicit commentary on social impact taking into account particular community history, context and sensitivities; and</p> <p>(c) incorporates a critically analytical assessment of the potential impact on the community of proposed change referring to both qualitative and quantitative values.</p>	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Airservices has advised that its actions to address this recommendation are ‘in progress’, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it has amended its Environmental Assessment template to document the more detailed social impact information required;</li> <li>- its subsequent stakeholder engagement plans will incorporate the appropriate social impact analysis and context;</li> <li>- it has contracted a social impact specialist firm to strengthen its community engagement planning;</li> <li>- this focus is already included in the re-engagement with Hobart stakeholders and the community.</li> </ul> <p>Airservices has advised that since it began this work, it has identified dependencies with Recommendation 2 and the development of social impact criteria. Anticipated completion is now June 2019.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> In undertaking its Environmental Assessments and preparing reports on those assessments, Airservices should:</p> <p>(a) ensure that all assessment criteria, for both EPBC Act purposes and for assessment of social impact, are clearly explained in its documentation in a way that makes clear their purpose, whether they are primary or secondary, the assessment methodology, and the consequences that follow if a threshold is exceeded;</p> <p>(b) explicitly document any assumptions made and explain the basis for each assumption;</p> <p>(c) explicitly document its consideration of change proposals against its stated criteria;</p> <p>(d) undertake a more nuanced assessment of whether a change is ‘significant’ in social impact or under the EPBC Act requirements, taking into account both quantitative and qualitative values so that a non-binary and more informative approach is taken to assessment against criteria; and</p> <p>(e) refer to or document all relevant information that forms the basis of its environmental assessment and conclusions in a single explanatory Environmental Assessment report.</p>	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Airservices has advised that its actions to address this recommendation are ‘in progress’, and that its response is the same as for Recommendation 3.</p> <p>Airservices has additionally identified dependencies with Recommendation 2 and therefore work to address this recommendation is expected to be completed in June 2019.</p>

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> Airservices should access, through recruitment or otherwise, skilled and experienced subject matter expertise in the practice of community consultation. Leadership should give prominent support to this expertise so as to promote its influence and effect on Airservices' better performance in community consultation.</p>	<p><b>Closed</b> – Airservices has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- engaged a community engagement consultant to provide social impact and consultation advice for the duration of the Hobart Airspace Design Review;</li> <li>- recruited a Community Engagement Manager with extensive community engagement experience and skills to lead the Engagement team;</li> <li>- recruited other engagement staff with strong backgrounds in modern community engagement principles;</li> <li>- increased the capability of the community engagement team through training and access to community engagement specialists and expertise.</li> </ul> <p>The ANO considers these actions address the recommendation.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> Airservices should abandon its stated policy of making the Community Aviation Consultation Groups the primary site of its community consultation and instead, with the input and leadership of a skilled practitioner of community engagement, develop a community consultation strategy and guidelines to inform individual detailed strategies for individual changes.</p>	<p><b>Closed</b> – Airservices has demonstrated through its community engagement activities, in Hobart and in other changes across Australia through 2018 and into this year, that its engagement strategies are tailored to the individual circumstances of the proposed changes, in line with its updated guidelines.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> Airservices should ensure that, before deciding to propose a change and to commence to engage with a community about that change, it has acquainted itself with the context and recent history of that community and takes those matters into account, as far as practicable, in its decision making and in its engagement design.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b> – Airservices has advised that its actions to address this recommendation are 'in progress', and that it has links to the development of social impact criteria. As such, Airservices' work to address this recommendation is expected to be completed in June 2019.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> Airservices should, as part of its community consultation activity, approach the assessments and other material on which it bases its consultations from a critically analytical perspective so as to ensure that all relevant matters have been considered and the information provided to the community is timely, correct, relevant, transparent, comprehensive, consistent and logically sound.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b> – Airservices has advised that its actions to address this recommendation are complete.</p> <p>The ANO will await the current consultation efforts underway in Hobart before determining whether this recommendation can be closed.</p>

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<p><b>Recommendation 12:</b> Where Airservices identifies through complaints inconsistencies in information provided to residents and other stakeholders, Airservices should take early action to correct information given.</p>	<p><u>Ongoing</u> – Airservices has advised that it has taken a number of actions that it considers address this recommendation, and that its response is the same as for Recommendation 7.</p> <p>The ANO will await the current consultation efforts underway in Hobart before determining whether this recommendation can be closed.</p>