

Quarterly Report

December 2010 – February 2011

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report includes complaint statistics and a commentary on the second quarter of operations of the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman (ANO). The report is structured around the three key functions of the ANO, these being review and monitoring of Airservices Australia's complaint-handling, consultation, and the provision of information about aircraft noise.
- 1.2 During the quarter the ANO office was focussed on delivery of its first major review – *The Review of Airservices Australia's handling of aircraft noise complaints*. The review was published in late February and all 18 recommendations were accepted by Airservices Australia (Airservices).
- 1.3 To support this review, and the continuing steady flow of individual complaints, a Research Consultant with 30 years aviation experience commenced with the office, and will be continuing employment on a part-time arrangement.

2 Complaint handling

- 2.1 As mentioned above, the complaint handling review was the key focus of the ANO office this quarter. Primarily, this review recommended a shift in Airservices' emphasis from information provision about aircraft noise, to active investigation and resolution of complaints.
- 2.2 The review also highlighted a number of issues relating to aircraft noise that cross organisational and agency boundaries. These issues will be pursued separately by the ANO, with the aim of improving aircraft noise management nationally. As part of this work, the inaugural *Government Aviation Complaint Handlers Forum* was held in February and attended by representatives from the ANO office, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, Airservices, the Office of Transport Security, and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. The next meeting is scheduled for May 2011.
- 2.3 In December, the ANO office facilitated a Complaint-Handling Workshop with staff from Airservices' Noise Enquiry Unit (NEU). The input from the Ombudsman was well received by the NEU staff.
- 2.4 In early February the ANO office raised concerns over Airservices' rapid decision to cease, without notice, the option of submitting noise complaints via email. While understanding that Airservices had to address the issue of excessive use of the email system, the decision to cease submissions caused immediate concern by some complainants who raised the issue not only with the ANO office, but also at Ministerial level. After pursuing the matter with Airservices, the email option was reinstated with alternative measures to address the excessive use, by a few complainants, of the email system.

- 2.5 In the December 2010 to February 2011 quarter, the ANO received 30 new individual complaints (compared with 37 in the first quarter). 24 complaints were closed during the quarter, and the average time to resolve a complaint increased to 56 days. This increase was expected, as the cases closed in the first quarter of operations were relatively simple in nature. It is anticipated that there will be an increasing trend in 'days to resolve' during the first year of operations as more complex cases will take longer to complete.
- 2.6 Attachment 1 provides a more detailed summary of the ANO's complaint statistics.
- 2.7 Systemic issues emerging from complaints received to date indicate a need for either targeted reviews or issue management by other means. In particular, issues in Sydney, Perth and Fingal Head (Gold Coast) will be a focus in the latter half of 2011. Where individual complaints relate to these systemic issues, the individual case will be closed, and the complainant advised accordingly, and the issue will be addressed through either targeted reviews or other action.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 Consultation processes is an area to be addressed in more detail by the ANO office in the first half of 2011 and will be one of the key aspects addressed in the systemic issues reviews which are currently being scoped.
- 3.2 During the December 2010 to February 2011 quarter, the Ombudsman attended consultative forums in Melbourne, Parafield, and Adelaide with attendances at other locations scheduled.
- 3.3 The ANO office will continue to discuss and provide input into the development of Airservices' consultation processes and, where necessary, review the effectiveness of the processes.

4 Information Provision

- 4.1 The presentation and distribution of information related to aircraft noise is the third function of the ANO charter and one that is intrinsically related to the effectiveness of both complaint handling and consultation processes. For this reason, an examination of information provision will be incorporated into the systemic issue reviews referred to above.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The second quarter of ANO operations has been characterised by continued development of processes to handle individual complaints, while moving to address larger systemic issues. It was pleasing to note the positive responses from all stakeholders to the first ANO review, from Airservices staff through to complainants. This reflects success with the deliberate approach of constructive engagement with key issues rather than critical commentary on past practice.
- 5.2 The ANO office is currently focusing on the management of noise complaints in the complex environments of Perth and Sydney, and considering options to improve the methods of explaining to complainants why, in many cases, nothing can be done. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that small adjustments, where they can be made, are identified and implemented.
- 5.3 The ANO office is aware of the need to proceed with sensitivity when conducting reviews. Research into a number of areas of concern is underway prior to finalising any terms of reference. It is important that these reviews do not generate unrealistic expectations about what is possible, or create alarm from those who are concerned that any change might result in a worse noise outcome.
- 5.4 Airservices continues to work with the ANO office to respond to individual cases and support the work on broader systemic issues. At the same time we are increasingly aware of the challenges faced in Airservices as it seeks to achieve rapid reform in complaint handling, information sharing and consultation processes.



Ron Brent
Aircraft Noise Ombudsman
5 April 2011

Attachment 1 Summary of quarterly complaint statistics

	Dec-10	Jan-11	Feb-11	Quarterly Total
Number of complaints received:	14	4	12	30
State/Territory of complainants:	14	4	12	30
ACT	0	0	1	1
NSW	4	0	4	8
NT	0	0	0	0
QLD	0	0	2	2
SA	2	0	1	3
TAS	0	0	0	0
VIC	2	1	3	6
WA	6	3	1	10
Status	14	4	12	30
Closed	11	4	9	24
Referred to Airservices for further information	2	0	0	2
Under consideration within ANO Unit	0	0	3	3
Under active review by ANO	1	0	0	1
Of the closed complaints:				
Complaints not reviewed:	7	2	4	13
Complainant did not provide further information	1	0	0	1
Addressed in separate review	5	0	3	8
Outside charter scope	1	2	1	4
Outcome of reviewed complaints:	4	2	5	11
Referred to Airservices to respond directly	1	0	0	1
No change possible - explanation provided	3	2	4	9
Change adopted by Airservices Australia	0	0	1	1
 Time taken to close complaints: average days, including weekends and public holidays, from lodgement to close:	 56			