



# Annual Report

## 2023-24

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>From the Ombudsman.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Overview.....</b>	<b>5</b>
	2.1 Role of the ANO.....	5
	2.2 ANO Structure as at 30 June 2024 .....	5
	2.3 2023-24 at a glance .....	6
<b>3</b>	<b>Performance.....</b>	<b>7</b>
	3.1 Community engagement and information provision .....	8
	3.2 Complaints handling .....	9
	3.3 Key performance indicators .....	9
	3.4 Analysis of complaint handling.....	12
<b>4</b>	<b>Airservices .....</b>	<b>14</b>
	4.1 Complaints by Airport.....	15
	4.2 Issues arising from complaints about Airservices .....	16
	4.3 Response times by Airservices .....	18
	4.4 Airservices' community engagement processes .....	18
	4.5 Hobart Noise Abatement Plan (NAP) trial investigation .....	18
<b>5</b>	<b>Defence.....</b>	<b>19</b>
	5.1 Complaints by Airport.....	19
	5.2 Issues arising from complaints about Defence .....	20
	5.3 Complaint management.....	22
	5.4 RAAF Base Williamtown investigation .....	22
	5.5 Defence community engagement processes .....	22
<b>6</b>	<b>Federal government policy processes.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Governance and systems .....</b>	<b>25</b>
	7.1 Strategic planning .....	25
	7.2 Complaint handling guidelines .....	26
	7.3 Staff development .....	26

7.4	Complaints about the ANO including reviews by the Commonwealth Ombudsman .....	26
7.5	Freedom of Information requests .....	26
<b>8</b>	<b>Financial results.....</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Contact for further enquiries .....</b>	<b>28</b>
	Services available to help you .....	28
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>ANO Complaint Statistics .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>ANO assessment of action on recommendations .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>ANO Key performance indicators .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>ANO Strategic Plan 2024-2027.....</b>	<b>32</b>

## 1 From the Ombudsman

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Previous annual reports have noted the historical deficits of Airservices in the engagement of the community in the design and implementation of flight paths. Flight path design occurred with no input from impacted communities and community engagement was a secondary matter that was circumscribed by the design rather than informing it.

It must be acknowledged that Airservices has over the past five years invested considerably more resources in community engagement, not least because of significant adverse community reaction in Hobart, the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane. The intensification of activity in this area is welcome, although significant residual hostility towards Airservices from persons affected remains.

The increased capacity and activity of Airservices' community engagement is welcome although the integration of community engagement outcomes into operational procedures poses a further challenge. Operational areas need to give appropriate weight to flight path changes proposed through community engagement and the final decisions need to be objectively reasonable and transparent. This is essential to the credibility of Airservices' community engagement.

This year included a review of such an instance from Hobart and has led to Airservices' recognition that it needs clear internal procedures so that community engagement outcomes receive appropriate determinations. The ANO has reported the matter to the Airservices Board and will monitor implementation.

Complaints to the ANO were slightly down on previous years although annual figures fluctuate considerably depending on airport activity and development. The ANO's community engagement activities increased during the year as did its engagement activities with Airservices and Defence.

My thanks go to the ANO staff who continue to work professionally under what are sometimes difficult situations. I also take this opportunity to thank the Airservices Board and Chief of Air Force for their continued support.



Kieran Pehm

Aircraft Noise Ombudsman  
21 August 2024

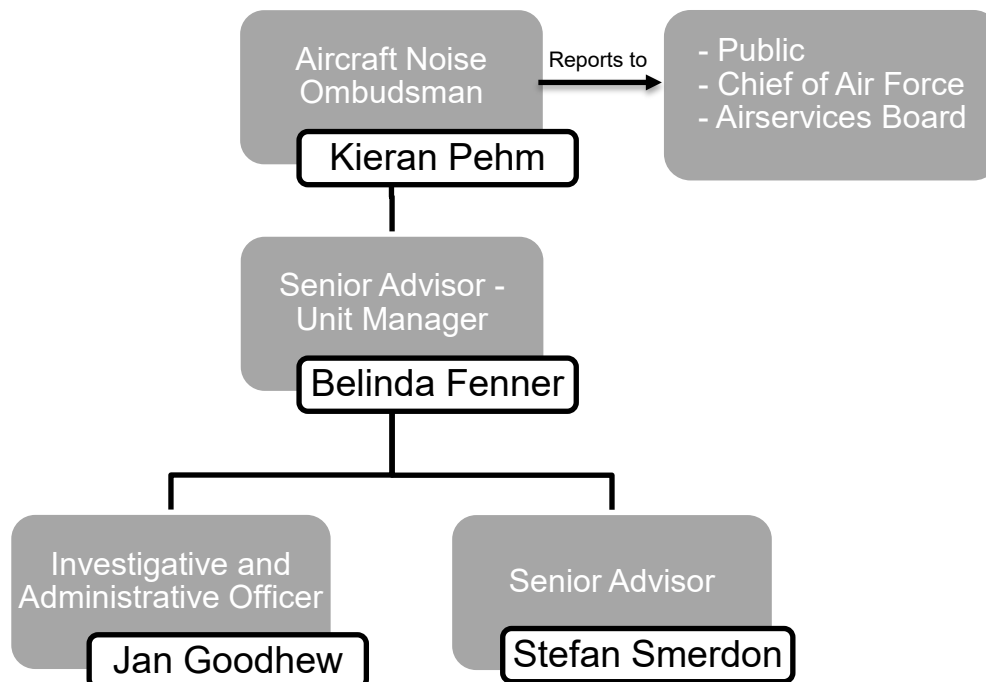
## 2 Overview

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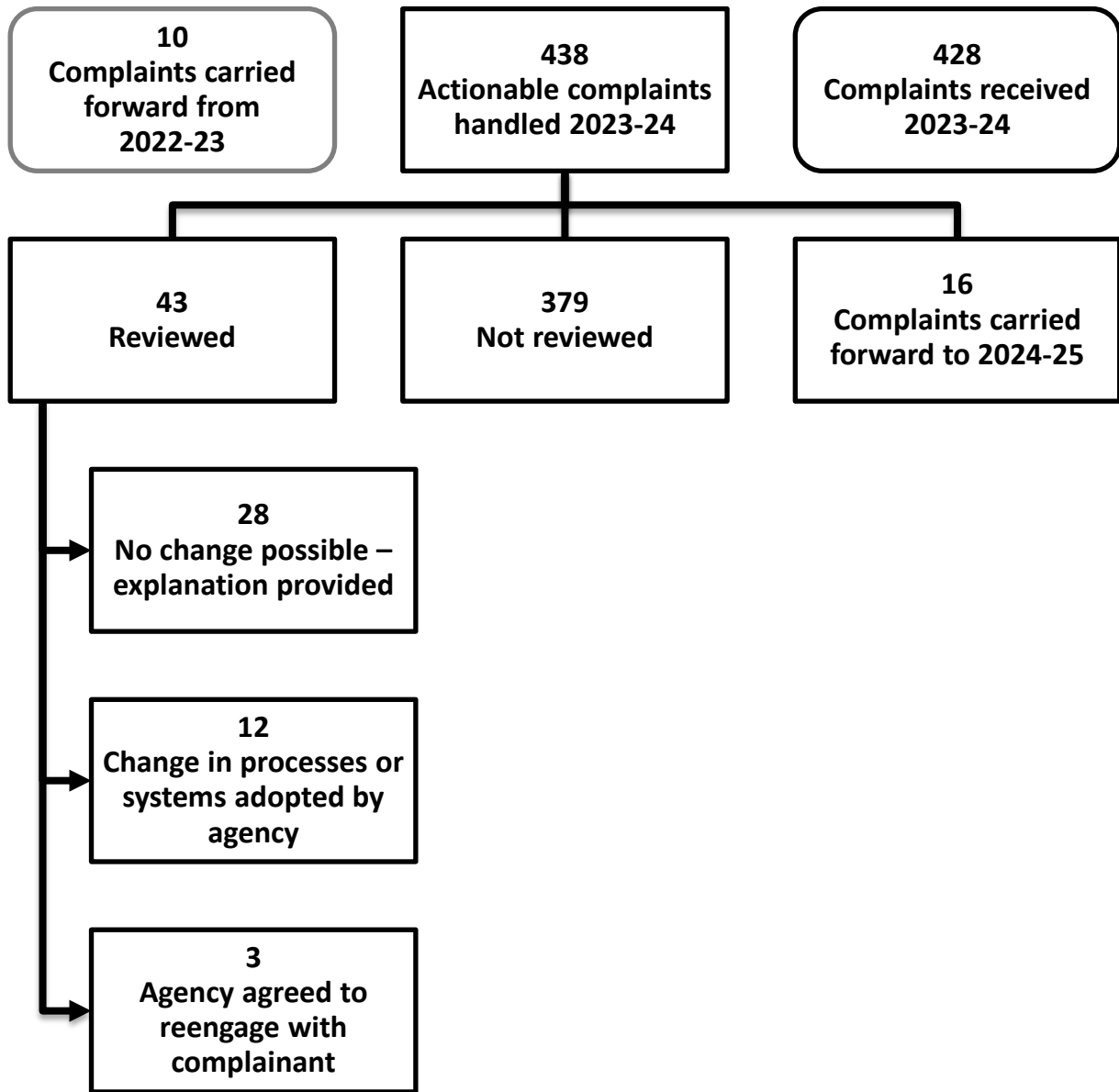
### 2.1 Role of the ANO

Under the ANO Charter, the role of the ANO is to review the handling of complaints and enquiries made to Airservices Australia (Airservices) and the Department of Defence (Defence) about aircraft noise. This includes monitoring, reporting and contributing to the effectiveness of community engagement processes relating to aircraft noise undertaken by Airservices and Defence (the Agencies), as well as the effectiveness of the presentation and distribution of aircraft noise-related information.

### 2.2 ANO Structure as at 30 June 2024



### 2.3 2023-24 at a glance



### 3 Performance

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This annual report marks the end of the 2021-2024 ANO Strategic Plan period. The measures of success for the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan were that:

- The public is aware of our role and our services are accessible to all
- Our work is undertaken in a timely, effective and efficient manner
- We communicate effectively and constructively with Agencies and with the public
- Our recommendations are accepted, implemented and effective.

#### **Awareness and Accessibility**

Over the past three years, the ANO has focussed on increasing awareness of the ANO with the public and improving accessibility for community members who may experience barriers in making complaints. Actions to address this include increasing attendance of Community Aviation Consultation Groups (CACG) and equivalent. In the 2023-2024 financial year, the ANO approached airports to whose CACGs the ANO was not regularly invited. In response, the ANO office received invitations to a number of additional CACGs, including some locations which the ANO had not attended since 2013. Further information on the 2023-24 CACG outreach program is available in Section 3.1.

A major upgrade of the ANO website was completed in 2022 to improve accessibility for those seeking to make a complaint or obtain information on the ANO's work. The ANO also provides accessibility services available on the ANO website for those individuals who may be d/Deaf, hard of hearing or who need an interpreter to assist with making a complaint.

#### **Timeliness and efficiency**

The ANO experienced a significant increase in complaints to the ANO office as a result of the new flight paths for Brisbane Airport, introduced in July 2020. Higher numbers of complaints to the ANO continued over the past 3 years. To improve the capacity of the ANO to effectively manage periods of increased complaints, the ANO also invested in a number of improvements to both the ANO complaint system (ANOCs) and the office policies and procedures over the period. Notably, this has included enhanced complaint reporting capabilities in ANOCs to identify trends in complaints, for the ANO's public reporting and to support communication with the agencies.

The ANO substantially met its key performance targets for complaint handling and tightened them for future years. Further detail on the ANO's performance against its KPIs for the 2023-24 year can be found at section 3.3.

## Effective communication with agencies

The ANO office meets regularly with both Airservices and Defence personnel, both through regularly scheduled meetings and ad-hoc meetings as required. Regular monthly meetings between the ANO senior advisors, Airservices' senior staff in the community engagement team and the Noise Complaint and Information Service (NCIS) Manager continued. In addition, the ANO team have quarterly meetings with Airservices' community engagement and NCIS teams. The ANO Unit Manager also has regular quarterly meetings with the Defence staff officer.

## Effective recommendations

Since July 2021, the ANO made 7 recommendations to the Board of Airservices, all of which were accepted. No recommendations were made to the Chief of Air Force (CAF) during this period.

Of the 7 recommendations made to Airservices, only one remains open, related to the ANO's investigation into East Melbourne flight paths. Details on the status of this open recommendation are available at Appendix 2.

Through improved communication with agencies, reviews of complaints may also be effectively resolved without resulting in a report to the CAF or Airservices' Board. Examples of this are discussed in sections 4 and 5.

## The next 3 years

The ANO has developed a new strategic plan for the years 2025-27. The plan seeks to address the potential challenges such as new airport developments and Defence's strategic move to the north of Australia. It also tightens the ANO's key performance indicators for complaints. More detail can be found at section 7.1 of this report and a copy of the new strategic plan at **Appendix 3**.

### 3.1 Community engagement and information provision

In 2023-24, ANO staff continued to attend community meetings. ANO staff attended 8 meetings or events involving community stakeholders over the year.

Further to the community stakeholder events above, ANO staff attended 16 airport CACGs (or equivalent) meetings, across 13 airports. The ANO focussed on expanding the range of airport CACGs that staff attended, in the past year, supported by the increased availability of technology. This year, the ANO staff attendance of community meetings included attendance of the RAAF Base Williamtown and RAAF Base Amberley Working Groups. Attending these meetings as an observer enables the ANO staff to monitor the effectiveness of community engagement undertaken by Airservices and Defence including their presentation and distribution of aircraft noise-related information. Additionally, these meetings provide the ANO staff with direct knowledge of emerging aircraft noise management issues, as well as fostering a broader understanding and awareness of the ANO's role and aircraft noise management issues. On request, the ANO also made presentations on its role and functions at 5 meetings.



## 3.2 Complaints handling

The ANO received 428 actionable complaints in 2023-24, a decrease from the 536 complaints received in 2022-23. The ANO carried over 10 open complaints from 2022-23. Of the total 438 complaints handled in 2023-24, 422 were finalised during the year. Of these, 43 complaints were reviewed in detail and 314 were referred to either Airservices or Defence to respond to directly – the ANO Charter requires complaints be first made to Airservices or Defence unless there are exceptional circumstances. A further 37 complaints were closed without review due to a lack of information from the complainant, with an additional 12 referred to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, 3 raising concerns specific to the remit of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The remaining 13 complaints were referred to other agencies such as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. This left 16 open complaints carried forward into the 2024-25 financial year.

The ANO also receives complaints relating to aircraft noise which do not enliven action under the terms of the ANO Charter. Such matters include where the ANO is copied in on complaints to other parties, where the complaint is beyond the remit of the ANO or when the substance of the complaints have been previously dealt with. Of the 1,967 non-actionable complaints received by the ANO during the financial year, 1,852 complaints did not require a response. The remaining 115 non-actionable complaints required a limited response, generally in the form of referral information.

**Appendix 1** provides a complete account of ANO complaint statistics for 2023-24.

During 2023-24, the ANO did not finalise any reviews which resulted in reports to the Airservices Board or the Chief of the Air Force. The ANO monitored Agency progress on all recommendations from previous reviews that remained open at the start of this financial year. The ANO's assessment of progress against these recommendations is summarised in **Appendix 2**.

## 3.3 Key performance indicators

The following sections detail KPI compliance levels for the 2023-24 financial year in relation to the complaint handling processes. A summary of compliance against these KPIs is available in **Appendix 3**.

KPIs for complaints received by the ANO office are divided based on whether the complaint is a single complaint or part of a multi-complaint review.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of whether a complaint is part of a multi-complaint review or not, the ANO office aims to finalise all complaints within 12 months and 50% within 6 months.

### 3.3.1 Acknowledgement of complaints

The ANO has a KPI of 2 days and 3 days to acknowledge complaints related to single complaints and multi-complaints, respectively. During the financial year, 100% compliance was achieved against this KPI for multi-complaints. As shown in Figure 1, 7 complaints (2%)

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<sup>1</sup> Separate KPI's for complaints within a multi-complaint review reflect the more complex nature of multi-complaint reviews and that they generally involve consideration of large amounts of evidence.

were made by phone during the ANO office shutdown period over Christmas and as a result did not meet the KPI target for single complaints.

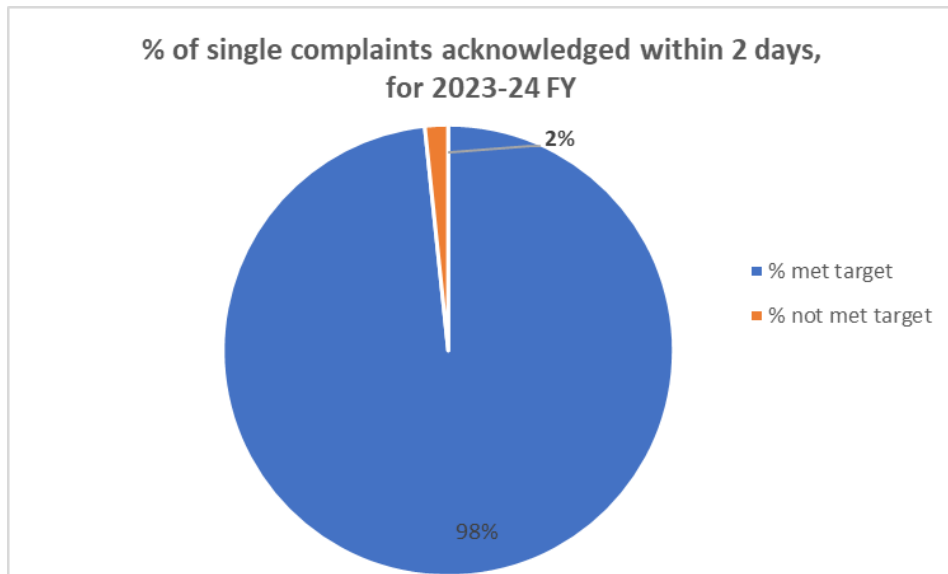


Figure 1: % of single complaints acknowledged within target period, for 2023-24.

### 3.3.2 Determination of complaints

Once a complaint is received, the ANO has 14 days for single complaints, or 21 days for multi-complaints, to determine whether the complaint is within the scope of the ANO Charter. As shown in Figure 2, 99% compliance was achieved for the single complaints KPI. A single complaint failed this KPI during the quarter due to a technical error resulting in incorrect processing of the complaint. Due to the Christmas shutdown of the ANO office, an additional 4 single complaints received also failed the target for the determination of complaints.



Figure 2: % of single complaints with a decision made within target period, for 2023-24.

Full compliance against the KPI for multi-complaints was achieved.

**3.3.3 Progress reports to complainants**

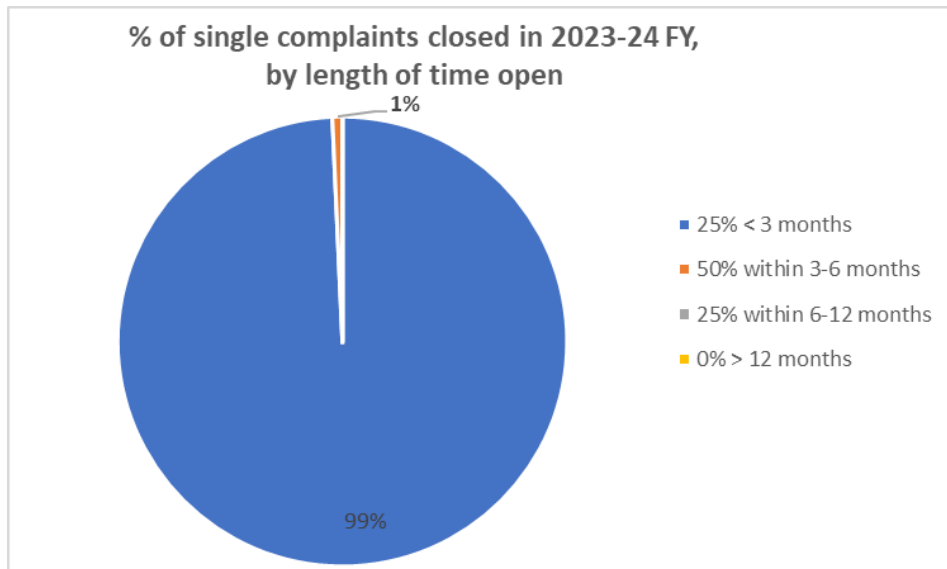
The ANO office provides regular updates to complainants on progress, during the course of a review.<sup>2</sup> Full compliance was achieved for single complaints during the financial year, with the exception of a single complaint impacted by a technical error in January 2024.

During this financial year, full compliance was achieved for this target in relation to multi-complaints. Under the ANO Charter, where the ANO reviews and provides its assessment of a complaint to the responsible Agency, the Agency must be allowed a reasonable opportunity to address any concerns raised by that assessment. As this can take some time, the ANO does not provide ongoing progress reports to complainants. Eight complaints associated with a multi-complaint review relating to Hobart flight paths were in this category and remained on hold between November 2023 and May 2024.

**3.3.4 Time taken to finalise complaints**

As shown in Figure 3 below, all single complaints were closed in the identified target windows, with 99% closed within 3 months of receipt. Three complaints (1%) remained open between 3-6 months.

The ANO’s objective is to complete and close multi-complaint reviews in 12 months or less, with a target for 50% of complaints to be closed within 6 months. The ANO finalised 100% of multi-complaint reviews within 6 months.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 3: % of single complainants closed in the 2023-24, by length of time open**

<sup>2</sup> For both individual complaints and multi-complaint reviews, the KPI target is for updates to occur every 28 days or less.

<sup>3</sup> Where the ANO provides its assessment of a complaint to Airservices or Defence and they take time to resolve the complaint, this time is not included in calculating the time taken by the ANO.

### 3.4 Analysis of complaint handling

Figure 4 charts complaints received, closed and carried forward each year for the past 5 years. The high numbers of complaints received since 2020-21 were generated from the introduction of new flight paths for Brisbane Airport. The ANO’s investigation of the Brisbane flight paths commenced in December 2020 and was published in October 2021.

The ANO anticipates that it will continue to see periods of high complaint activity associated with any major change to aircraft operations, such as new runways or major airspace designs.

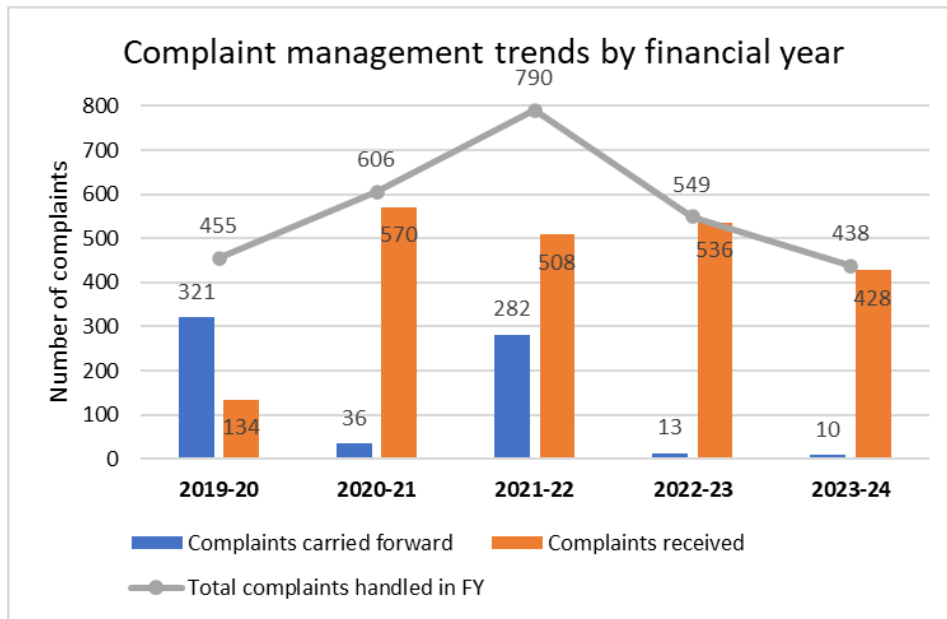


Figure 4: Trends in complaint handling between 2019-20 and 2023-24.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 5 below details the changes in the complaints received by the ANO over time, separating the complaints received related to Airservices or Defence.

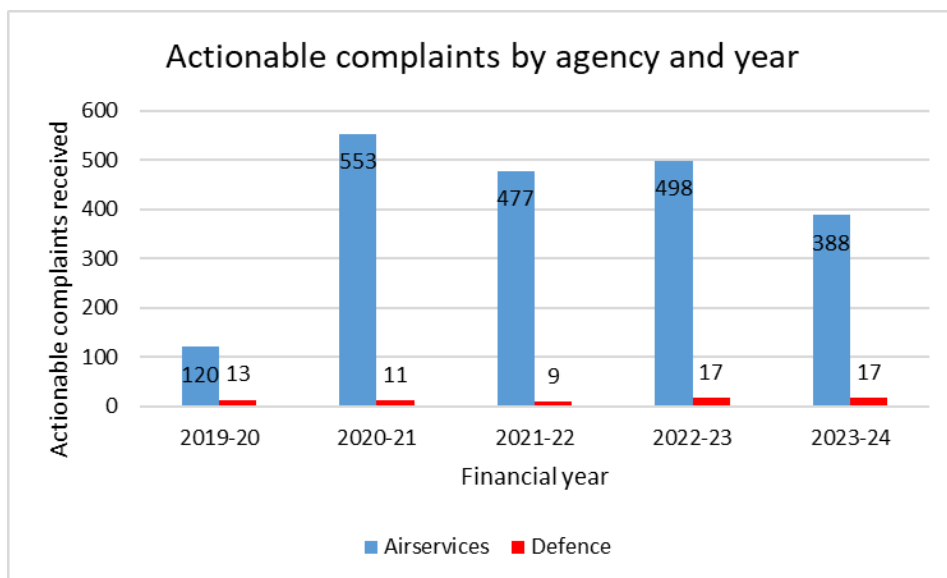


Figure 5: Actionable complaints received by financial year (FY), related to Airservices and Defence.

<sup>4</sup> “Complaints handled” includes all complaints received in the current year or carried over from the previous.

The ANO continued to engage with both Airservices and Defence in relation to complaint handling processes. In addition to formal feedback and outcomes associated with ANO reviews, the ANO office continues to provide feedback and discuss opportunities for improvement with the agencies' complaint handling systems and processes.

Figure 6 shows the total number of actionable complaints closed, including the proportion of closed complaints that were reviewed over the last five years. The high levels of complaints reviewed by the ANO in 2019-20 and 2021-22 reflect multi-complaint reviews of both the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane respectively. The smaller number of complaints reviewed by the ANO in other years are individual complaints about separate matters.

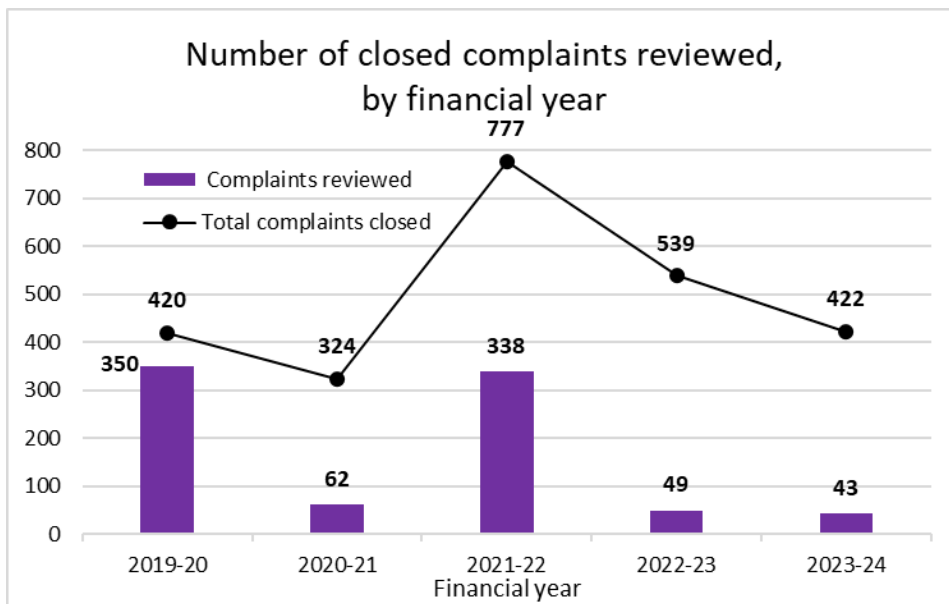
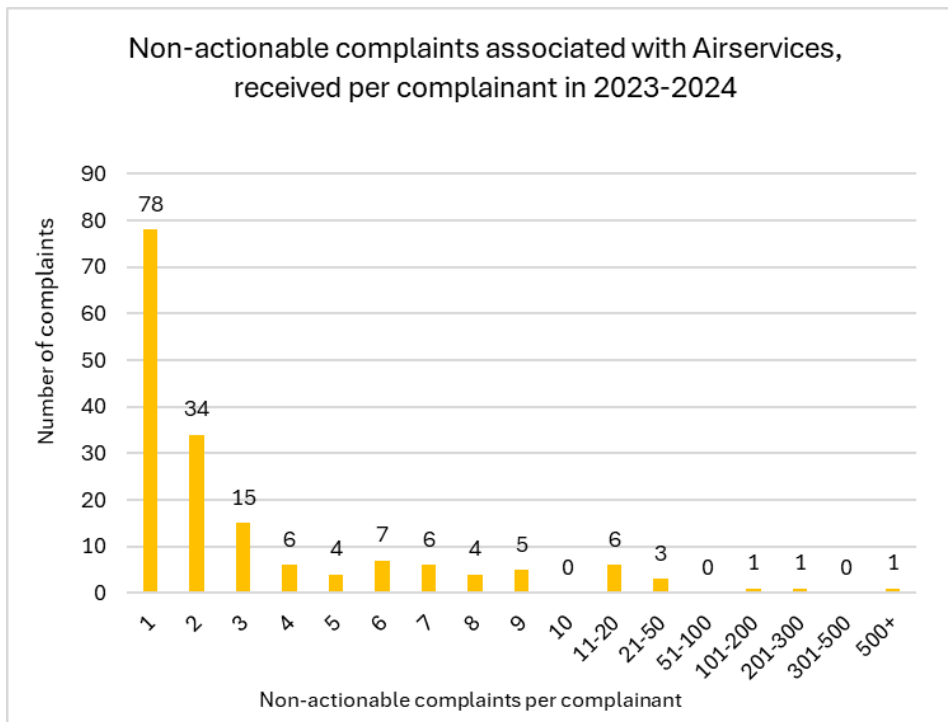


Figure 6: Number of closed complaints reviewed, between 2019-20 and 2023-24.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Complaints reviewed" includes only those where concerns were reviewed, and an outcome provided (others are not reviewed due to being out of scope or need to be referred to the agency in the first instance).

## 4 Airservices

The ANO received 1,941 non-actionable complaints about Airservices and aircraft noise. These complaints either did not engage the ANO’s role under its Charter or were multiple contacts from the same complainant, in relation to matters previously addressed by the ANO. Of these non-actionable complaints, almost half were submitted during the year by a single complainant.



**Figure 7: Non-actionable complaints associated with Airservices, received within the financial year, grouped by the number of complaints per complainant.**

The ANO received 388 actionable complaints about Airservices and finalised 382. Of these, 299 complaints had yet to be made to Airservices and, as required by the Charter, the ANO advised that they should first complain to Airservices. Sixteen complaints were associated with other agencies, including 2 relating to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and a further 9 associated with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. The final 30 complaints were closed without further review as the complainant did not provide requested information to support the ANO’s investigation.

During 2023-24, 37 complaints were reviewed by the ANO. Nine of these led to a change in Airservices action (Figure 8). Having investigated the issues for the remaining 28 complaints, the ANO provided a detailed explanation to each complainant about why there was no practical change possible.

Of the 9 Airservices cases where a change was adopted, these generally related to providing additional information to the complainant, changes in complaint handling processes or changes in approach to future information provided to complainants.

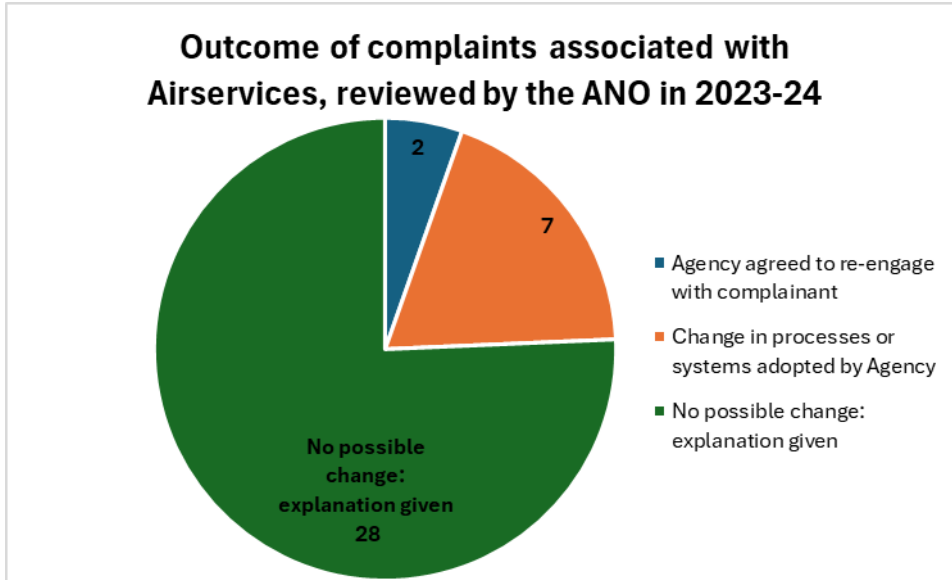


Figure 8: Outcome of complaints associated with Airservices, reviewed by the ANO in 2023-24.

#### 4.1 Complaints by Airport

As shown in Figure 9, many of the actionable complaints received this financial year continue to be attributed to the opening and operation of the new runway for Brisbane, with 235 complaints (61%).

In addition to the airport specific complaints, a further 18 complaints did not include sufficient information to identify the airport of concern. This includes helicopter operations due to the range of potential helipads a helicopter may operate from.

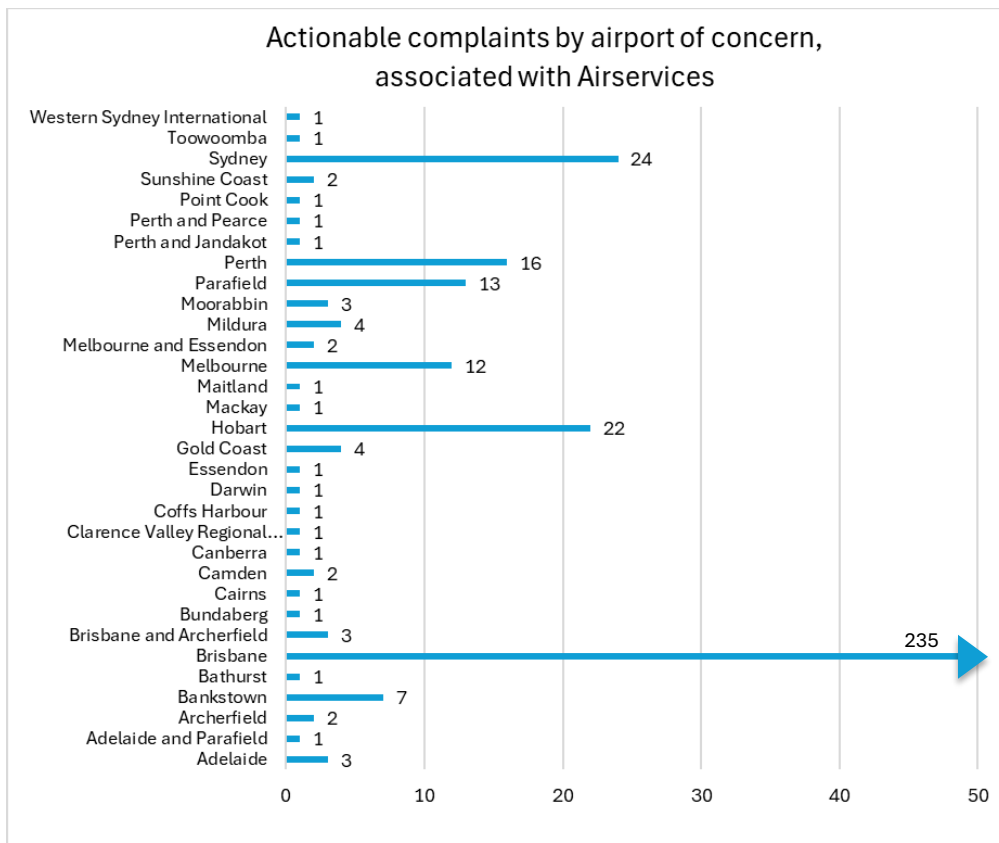


Figure 9: Actionable complaints received by ANO by airport of concern and agency, July 2023 – June 2024.

## 4.2 Issues arising from complaints about Airservices

Actionable complaints received are classified by the ANO office under one of three themes - aircraft noise issues; agency specific issues (where the complaint is about the conduct of the relevant agency in their dealings with the complainant) and other issues outside of the remit of the ANO. Figure 10 shows the distribution of the issues raised, with aircraft noise related concerns the most common.

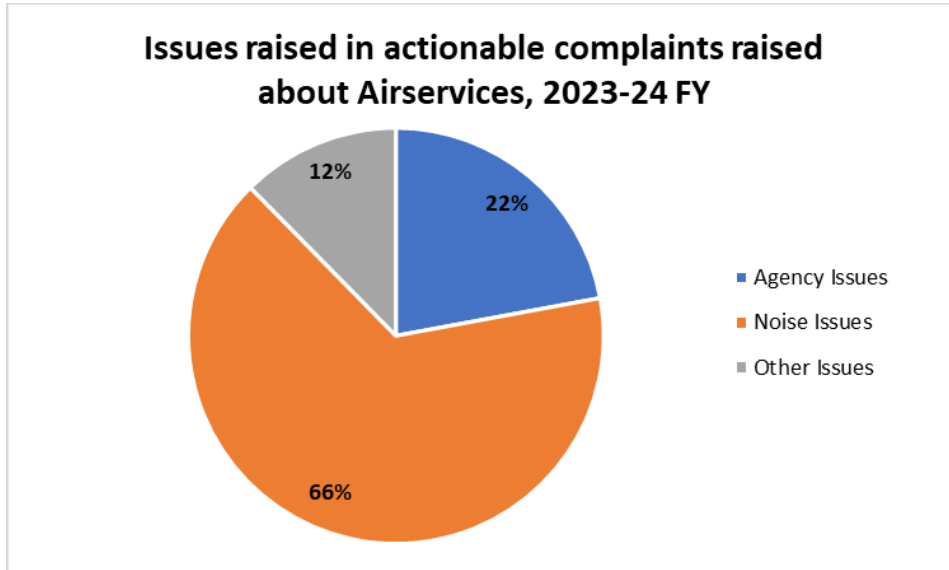


Figure 10: Issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24 FY

As shown in Figure 11, complaints about community engagement and the timeliness or lack of responses were the most common Agency issues raised in relation to Airservices. In this financial year, these concerns related predominantly to a combination of concerns about activities associated with the new Brisbane flight paths Post-implementation Review (PIR), with a smaller proportion related to the Sunshine Coast PIR and implementation of the Hobart PIR recommendations. Concerns regarding timeliness related to delays in Airservices' Noise Complaints and Information Services (NCIS) response times.

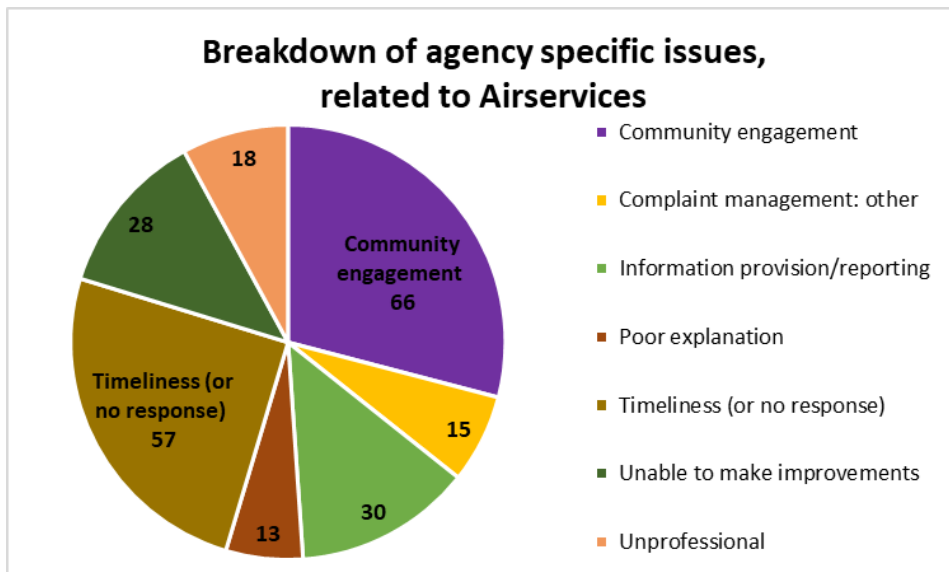


Figure 11: Agency-specific issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24 FY



As shown in Figure 12, health and well-being concerns including reported aircraft noise impacts on mental health and sleep are a consistent concern raised with the ANO during the past year. Health and well-being concerns have consistently been a key concern raised with the ANO since 2021-2022.

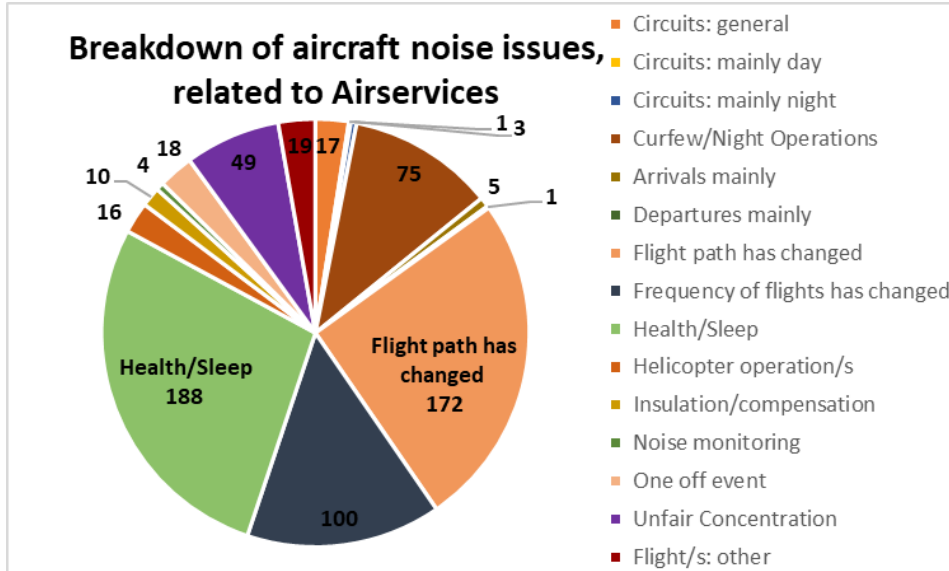


Figure 12: Aircraft noise related issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24 FY.

Figure 13 below shows other issues raised by complainants that were outside the remit of the ANO. Since 2022, the ANO has observed an increase in requests for greater regulation, enforcement of existing noise abatement procedures or fly neighbourly agreements, or dissatisfaction with existing aviation regulation. Requests for regulation was the most common “other” issue raised in the past year, representing 9% of all issues raised in Aircservices related complaints. Of the requests for regulation, 52 of the 88 were specifically seeking the introduction of a curfew.

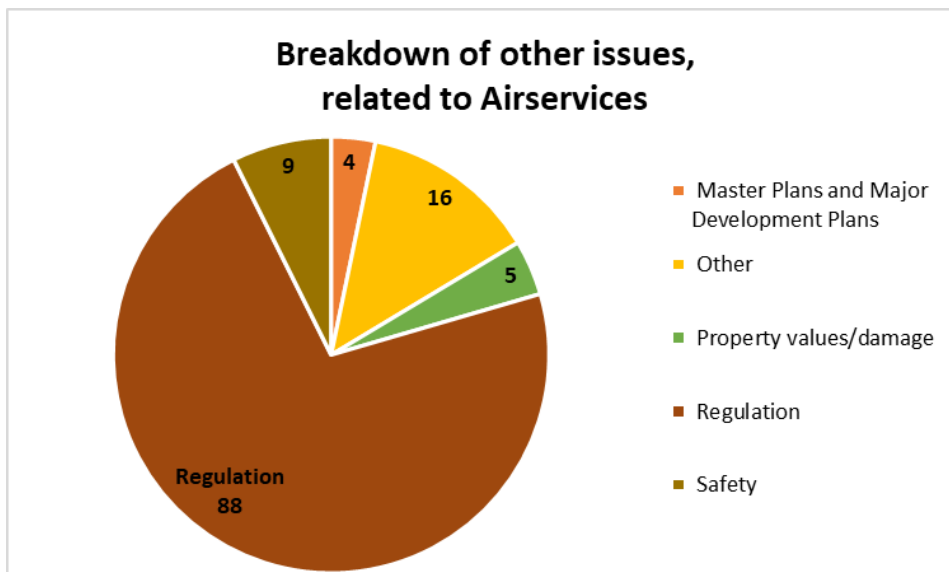


Figure 13: Issues outside of the ANO’s jurisdiction, raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24 FY

### **4.3 Response times by Airservices**

Between July and December 2023, the ANO received a large number of complaints related to the length of time taken for Airservices' Noise Complaints and Information Service (NCIS) to respond to complaints. This issue had been observed late in the previous reporting period with the ANO escalating these concerns to Airservices' management and the Airservices' Board in July 2023. A number of changes were implemented by Airservices throughout July-December 2023 to address the issue. From January 2024, the NCIS have been meeting their response target of 21 days for standard responses, though more complex complaints may require longer to enable sufficient investigation.

The ANO office is pleased to note that not only has Airservices' taken steps to address the extended response time for the NCIS but has also developed an action plan to ensure that higher than normal complaint numbers can be managed in a timely manner in the future.

### **4.4 Airservices' community engagement processes**

The ANO continued to work with Airservices' staff on engagement projects as they were delivered. Airservices conducted consultation on Phase 2 and 3 of the Noise Action Plan for Brisbane. In addition, Airservices held community information sessions prior to the commencement of the Hobart Noise Abatement Plan (NAP) trial.

In order to further the ANO office's understanding of Airservices' community engagement processes, one of the ANO Senior Advisors spent two days with Airservices' Community Engagement team as an observer, in May 2024. This enabled the ANO office to gain a greater understanding of how Airservices' community engagement team operates and potential barriers they may experience. The ANO office thanks Airservices' community engagement team for hosting the ANO.

### **4.5 Hobart Noise Abatement Plan (NAP) trial investigation**

In August 2023, the ANO commenced a multi-complaint review of complaints about Airservices' rejection of a Noise Abatement Procedure proposed after extensive community engagement. Following provision of the ANO's assessment to Airservices in September 2023, it set aside its original decision to reject the NAP proposal and committed to a review of its procedures for approving and implementing community suggested flight path changes.

The proposed NAP trial for Hobart commenced in June 2024 and this aspect of the complaints has therefore been resolved. Airservices' review of its internal procedures has not been progressed in a timely manner and the ANO reported this to the Board in July 2024.

While Airservices has invested considerably more resources in its community engagement, the outcomes of such engagement, such as proposed for flight path changes, have yet to be adequately integrated into Airservices' operational areas. It is central to the credibility of Airservices' community engagement that the outcomes receive fair and transparent consideration and determination.

## 5 Defence

The ANO received 9 non-actionable complaints about Defence and aircraft noise. These complaints did not engage the ANO’s role under its Charter. In addition, some complaints were multiple contacts from the same complainant on an issue previously considered and addressed by the ANO office.

The ANO received 17 actionable complaints about Defence and finalised 17. Of the 11 complaints closed without an ANO review, 9 of the complaints had yet to be made to Defence and, as required by the Charter we advised they should first complain to Defence. One complaint was outside of the ANO scope and as such referred to the relevant agency, with a final complaint closed as the complainant did not provide additional information to support the ANO review.

During 2023-24, all 6 of the complaints reviewed led to action by Defence (Figure 14). Three of these complaints were the result of the ANO’s multi-complaint review related to Williamstown, which was finalised in October 2023.

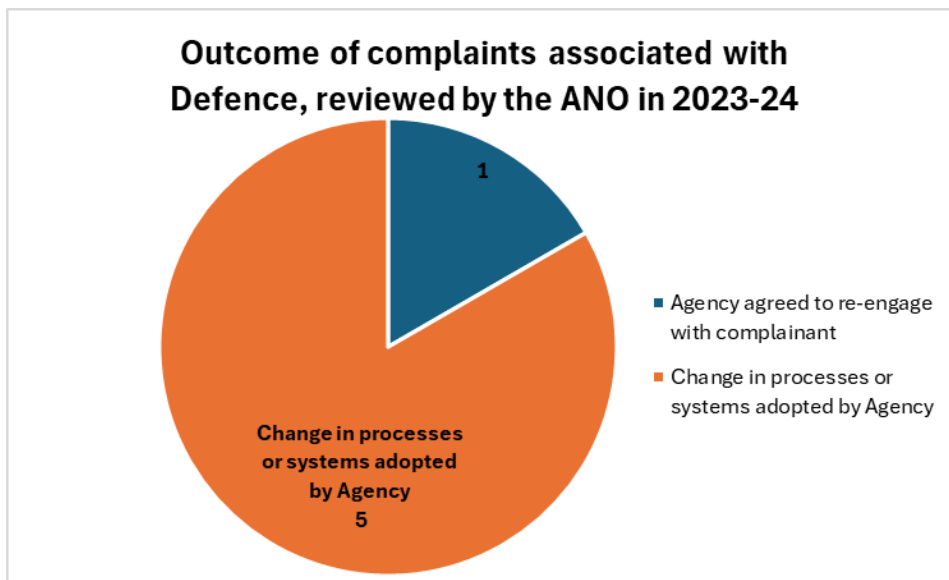


Figure 14: Outcome of complaints associated with Defence, reviewed by the ANO in 2023-24.

### 5.1 Complaints by Airport

As shown in Figure 15, the actionable complaints received this financial year were spread across a number of bases and regiments.

In addition to the airport specific complaints, a further 2 complaints did not include sufficient information to identify the airport of concern. This includes helicopter operations due to the range of potential helipads a helicopter may operate from.

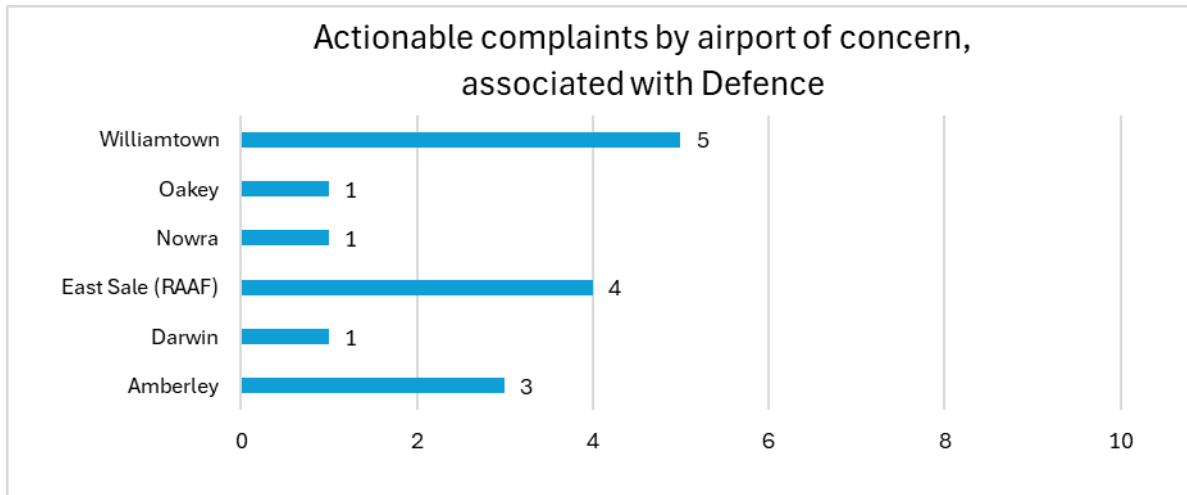


Figure 15: Actionable complaints received by ANO by airport of concern and agency, July 2023 – June 2024.

## 5.2 Issues arising from complaints about Defence

The following figures show issues raised in actionable complaints received by the ANO office, associated with Defence. Figure 16 shows the distribution of the issues raised, with aircraft noise related concerns the most common.

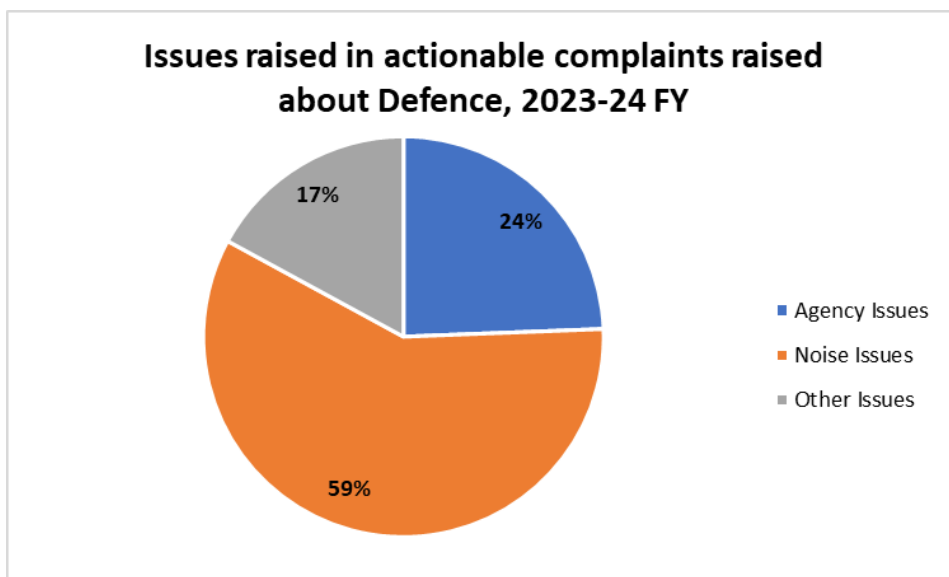


Figure 16: Issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24 FY

As shown in Figure 17, complaints about the timeliness or lack of response to complaints were the most common Agency issue raised.

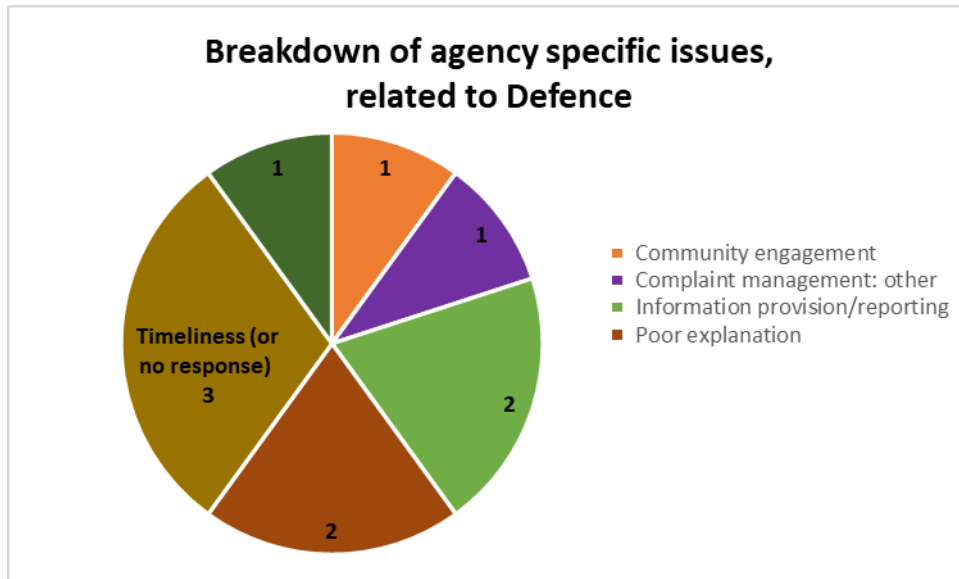


Figure 17: Agency-specific issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24

Figure 18 shows that health and well-being concerns and night operations were the noise issues most frequently raised in the financial year.

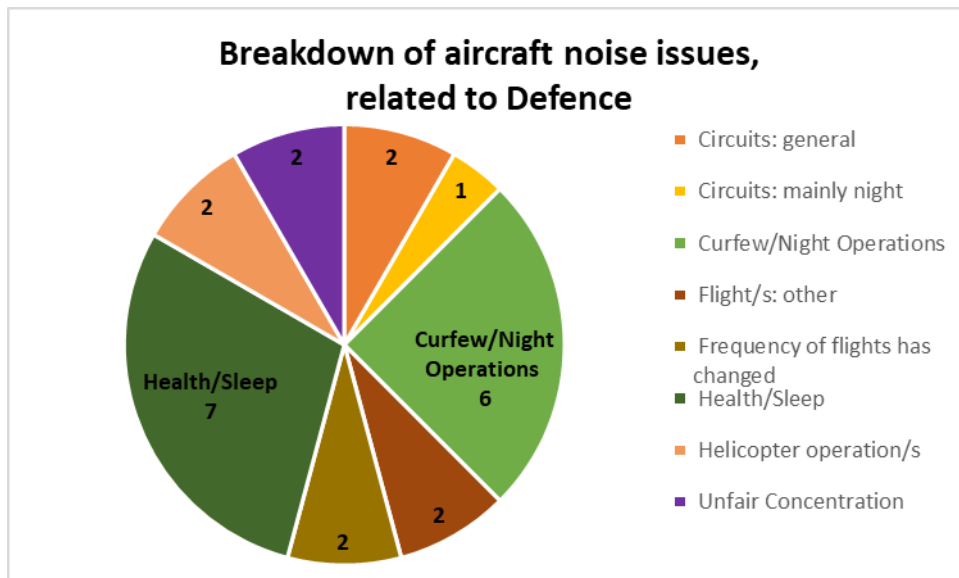


Figure 18: Aircraft noise related issues raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2022-23

Figure 19 below shows other issues raised by complainants that were outside the remit of the ANO. During the last financial year, an increase in requests for greater regulation of military operations in regard to low flying operations was received by the ANO.

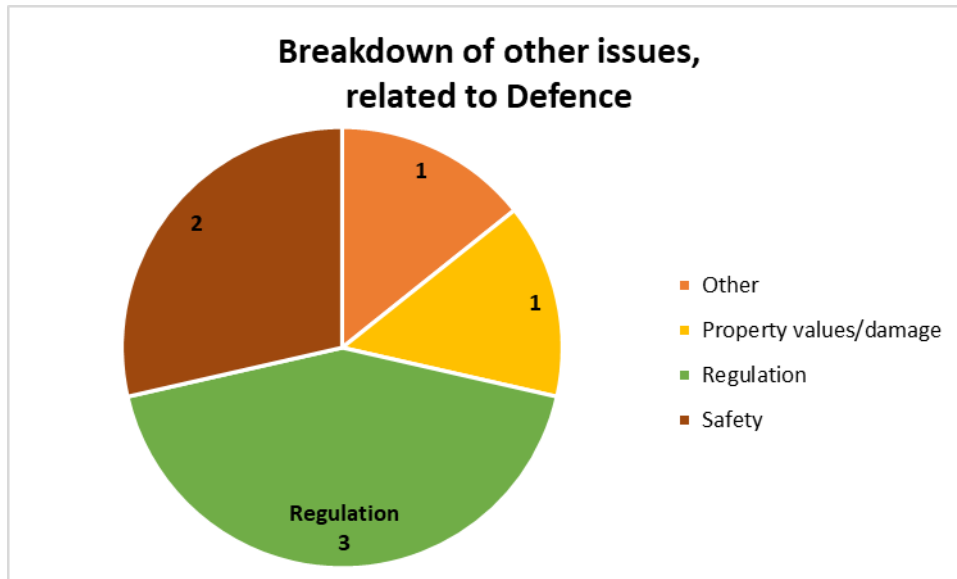


Figure 19: Issues outside of the ANO's jurisdiction, raised in complaints received by the ANO, 2023-24

### 5.3 Complaint management

ANO reviews of complaints associated with Defence have found historic issues with Defence's records management in relation to complaints, including personnel not filing correspondence in the correct location or deleting correspondence that they considered insignificant. It appears that the regular rotation of personnel into new positions is a key contributor to this issue.

Poor filing can make it difficult both for personnel to provide appropriate responses to complainants that are consistent with previous interactions and create difficulties for the ANO to review complaint handling after the fact.

Defence have taken steps to address these issues going forward.

### 5.4 RAAF Base Williamtown investigation

In April 2023, the ANO commenced a multi-complaint review as provided for in clause 47 of the ANO Charter. The ANO's assessment of the complaints was provided to Defence in September 2023. Defence provided a response to the ANO detailing actions taken by Defence to resolve the matter. The ANO finalised the review as resolved in October 2023.

### 5.5 Defence community engagement processes

ANO reviews of Defence complaint handling and community engagement activities have found that Defence personnel are generally proactive in meeting concerned community members in person or calling to discuss their concerns. These personal interactions are important for building trust with the community and as such the ANO encourages Defence to continue promoting these behaviours.

Over the past three years, the ANO office has identified through its reviews that the final step of following up in writing with the community member after these conversations is often missed. The final stage of summarising and sharing what has been discussed and in particular, any commitments made by Defence to address community concerns, is an important step to ensure a shared understanding is held at the time but also in the future,

acknowledging that recollections of discussions do change over time for both parties. The ANO office is continuing to work with Defence to encourage adoption of this practice consistently across all bases and aviation regiments.

## 6 Federal government policy processes

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Over the past year, the impact and mitigation of aircraft noise was referred to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report on 6 February 2024. The ANO made a submission to the inquiry which can be accessed [here](#).

The ANO also made a submission to and attended a panel discussion with staff of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts for the Aviation White Paper as part of the Aviation Green Paper consultation process.



## 7 Governance and systems

During the 2023-24 financial year, the ANO office has continued to make improvements to its systems and processes to better manage the anticipated increase in demand into the future.

### 7.1 Strategic planning

The ANO 2024-2027 Strategic Plan and Budget has been developed and is available at Appendix 4. The plan seeks to strengthen core competencies and prepare the ANO office for the significant changes in Australian aviation, planned for the next strategic plan cycle. The Plan includes some tightening of timeframes in the basic key performance indicators for complaint handling, which are highlighted in Table 1. Additionally, a new KPI has been introduced measuring the time from commencement of a multi-complaint review to the provision of a critical ANO assessment to Airservices and Defence. This KPI is significant as there can be an extended delay between the time that the ANO assessment is provided to an agency and the review either being closed or progressing to a public report.

**Table 1: Table of changes to ANO key performance indicators for 2024-2027.**

Complaint type	Key performance indicator	Benchmark for July 2021-June 2024	Proposed Benchmark from July 2024
Single complaint	Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction	Within 14 days	Within 7 days
	Time from complaint received to closed		50% < 1 month
		25% < 3 months	25% within 1-3 months
		50% within 3-6 months	15% within 3-6 months
		25% within 6-12 months	10% within 6-12 months
		0% > 12 months	0% > 12 months
Complaints in a multi-complaint review	Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction	Within 21 days	Within 14 days
	Time from complaint received to final assessment provision to Agency		25% < 3 months
			50% within 3-6 months
			25% within 6-12 months
			0% > 12 months

With a large number of major aviation projects anticipated to be completed in the upcoming years, an assessment of predicted demand for the ANO's services suggests that service demand will likely remain the same or increase into the future. The ANO continues to develop the capacity to support the current and anticipated future demands for the service.

Although there are likely to be increases in demand, the 2024-2027 ANO budget has been brought into line with actual expenditure noting that the ANO operated well under budget over the past 5 years.

## **7.2 Complaint handling guidelines**

Over the past year, the office finalised and published its Investigative Guidelines and Complaint Management Procedure on the ANO website's "About Us" page [here](#).

## **7.3 Staff development**

The ANO has experienced an increase in distressed complainants who contact the office. In October 2023, to support both complainants and ANO staff, two members of the ANO team completed Lifeline's "Accidental Counsellor" training. Consequently, opportunities for improvement to the ANO procedures for handling distressed complainants have been identified and applied.

Both the ANO Senior Advisor and Senior Advisor-Unit Manager completed community engagement training through the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) during the year and are working towards the IAP2 Certificate of Engagement. The ANO Senior Advisor-Unit Manager also completed additional leadership training, and Mental Health First Aid training through the Australian Red Cross. Those staff who completed Lifeline training this year, will be completing additional training through the Mental Health First Aid training course in the next 12 months.

## **7.4 Complaints about the ANO including reviews by the Commonwealth Ombudsman**

Three complaints about the ANO were received in November and December 2023. These complaints related to dissatisfaction with Airservices' change of position on the outcome of the Hobart Noise Abatement Plan, following the ANO's assessment of the Hobart Noise Abatement Procedure (NAP) Trial outcome. The ANO clarified the remit of the office under the Charter and the complainants were advised of their right to take the matter to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

In May 2024, the ANO received notification of a preliminary inquiry being undertaken by the Commonwealth Ombudsman into complaints about the conduct of multiple responsible Commonwealth agencies regarding Brisbane flight paths. The ANO has provided relevant documentation to the Commonwealth Ombudsman to inform their consideration of the complaints.

## **7.5 Freedom of Information requests**

During the last financial year, the ANO office received and finalised one request under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) related to the ANO's Hobart Noise Abatement Plan (NAP) trial investigation.

## 8 Financial results

The ANO operates autonomously in managing its financial accountabilities, with a three-year funding cycle which provides the office with the flexibility to manage expenditure peaks and troughs that may occur across financial years. For the current funding cycle, this included additional funding for temporary staffing as required, to accommodate sudden changes in complaint numbers. In line with the ANO Charter, the ANO independently determines how funds and resources are allocated within the budget provided by Airservices and Defence.

During 2023-24, the ANO’s actual expenditure was 28% below the budget allocation. The total operating expenditure of the office was \$659,889 against a total budget of \$912,351. This under-spend compared to budget reflects reduced expenditure on travel costs throughout the financial year and that to date, the ANO office has not used the available surge funding, to employ temporary staff to support the office.

Figure 20 below depicts the ANO budget and actual expenditure over the last five years.

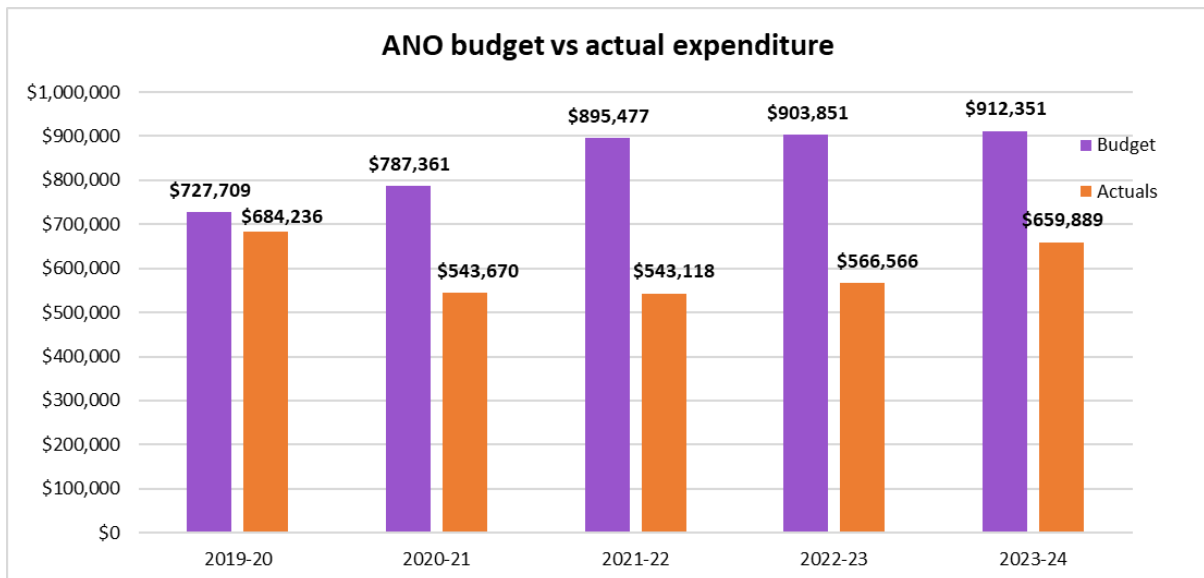


Figure 20: ANO budget and actual expenditure 2019-20 to 2023-24

For the three-year funding cycle from 2021-24, the ANO budget was \$2,711,678 with total expenditure of the ANO office of \$1,769,573.

## Contact for further enquiries

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For enquiries about this report, please contact the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman (ANO) via [ano@ano.gov.au](mailto:ano@ano.gov.au)

If you would like to make a complaint, please contact the ANO using one of the following options:

<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.ano.gov.au">www.ano.gov.au</a>
<b>Phone:</b>	1800 266 040
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:ano@ano.gov.au">ano@ano.gov.au</a>
<b>Post:</b>	GPO Box 1985 Canberra City ACT 2601

### Services available to help you

If you are seeking to make a complaint and require an interpreter to speak with us, or you are assisting a speaker with limited English, the ANO can arrange access to a free interpreter service through the Australian Government [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS\)](#).

For the ANO office to organise an interpreter, please email [ano@ano.gov.au](mailto:ano@ano.gov.au) (preferred) or call 1800 266 040, to request an interpreter. In your request please include the language required and a preferred time for the ANO and interpreter to call you, between 9AM and 4PM Sydney time, weekdays.

If you are a person who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing, or has impaired speech, the [National Relay Service](#) offers a range of options to assist you to connect. This includes the TTY (Speak and Read) service which is available by phoning 133 677.

## Appendix 1 ANO Complaint Statistics

The following summarises the ANO complaint statistics for 2023-24.

	Airservices	Defence	Unidentified	Total
Actionable complaints carried forward from 2023-24	6	4	0	10
Actionable complaints received:	388	17	20	425
<b>Total actionable complaints handled in 2023-24</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>435<sup>6</sup></b>

Non-actionable complaints – no response required	1843	5	3	1851
Non-actionable complaints – response provided	98	4	13	115
<b>Total non-actionable complaints received between in 2023-24</b>	<b>1941</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1966</b>

### Closed complaints – reviewed

Complainant did not provide further information	30	1	6	37
Outside Charter Scope – Department of Infrastructure	9	0	3	12
Outside Charter Scope – Minister	2	0	1	3
Outside Charter Scope – Other	5	1	4	10
Referred to Airservices/Defence to respond directly	299	9	6	314
<b>Total complaints closed - not reviewed:</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>376</b>

### Closed complaints – reviewed

No change possible - explanation provided	28	0	0	28
Change in processes or systems adopted by Agency	7	5	0	12
Agency agreed to re-engage with complainant	2	1	0	3
<b>Total complaints closed - reviewed:</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>43</b>

Actionable complaints closed during 2023-24	382	17	20	419
Actionable complaints carried forward to 2024-25	12	4	0	16

<sup>6</sup> Three complaints related to the ANO were received this financial year – please see **Section 4.2** for more information. ANO complaints are excluded from Appendix 1.

## Appendix 2 ANO assessment of action on recommendations

During the 2023-24 financial year, the ANO continued to monitor one recommendation Airservices had outstanding from the ANO's East Melbourne review (July 2021), which remains open. The following tables set out the open recommendation and the ANO's assessment of action against it.

Recommendations that were previously reported as closed have been removed.

### *Airservices – Investigation into complaints about flight paths over East Melbourne (July 2021)*

Ongoing recommendations	ANO assessment of agency response
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b> – I recommend Airservices continue its efforts to engage with the complainants to resolve their complaints including careful consideration of the alternate flight path suggested by them.</p>	<p><b>On hold:</b> Airservices advised that they continue to work with the East Melbourne Group (EMG) on the EMG's suggestion. The suggestions (3) have been assessed to determine if they are safe and flyable. Airservices have confirmed that the proposed changes are at the stage where community and industry consultation would be required.</p> <p>Due to Melbourne Airport's Major Development Plan (MDP) and Master Plan 2022 (MP) consultation (January – May 2022), Airservices have advised that this work is on hold until after that consultation activity, including confirmation of any changes to the MDP reflecting community feedback, is complete. While the MDP has been submitted, approval is currently outstanding.</p>

## Appendix 3 ANO Key performance indicators

The following table summarises the performance of the ANO against the identified complaint handling KPIs for the 2023-24 financial year. KPIs which met the specified target have been highlighted green, while any failed KPIs are red.

Complaint type	Key performance indicator	Benchmark	% Met target (2023-24 FY)
Single complaint	Acknowledgement of complaint	Within 2 business days	98%
	Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction	Within 14 days	99%
	Update to complainant on progress of complaint	Every 28 days	100%
		1 update failed	0%
		2 updates failed	0%
		3 updates failed	0%
	Time from complaint received to closed	25% < 3 months	99%
		50% within 3-6 months	1%
		25% within 6-12 months	0%
		0% > 12 months	0%
Complaints in a multi-complaint review	Acknowledgement of complaint	Within 3 business days	100%
	Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction	Within 21 days	100%
	Update to complainant on progress of complaint	Every 28 days or less	100%
		1 update failed	0%
		2 updates failed	0%
		3 updates failed	0%
	Time from complaint received to closed	50% < 6 months	100%
		50% within 6-12 months	0%
		0% > 12 months	0%

## **Appendix 4 ANO Strategic Plan 2024-2027**

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# Strategic Plan

1 July 2024 to 30 June 2027

## Values:

Independence  
Fairness  
Integrity  
Accountability  
Accessibility  
Efficiency  
Transparency

## Purpose:

To conduct independent reviews of Airservices's and Defence's ('the Agencies') handling of aircraft noise complaint handling, community engagement and provision of information.

Enhance the Agencies capacity in their administrative actions and decisions in the management of aircraft noise.

To influence enduring systemic improvement in the Agencies' management of aircraft noise.

To promote constructive relationships between the Agencies and the community in respect of aircraft noise.

## Role and Functions:

- Review the handling of complaints and enquiries made to the Agencies about aircraft noise.
- Monitor, report and contribute to the effectiveness of community engagement processes relating to aircraft noise undertaken by the Agencies.
- Monitor, report and contribute to the effectiveness of the presentation and distribution of aircraft noise-related information.
- Undertake targeted reviews of aircraft noise management.

## Strategic Objectives:

- Enhance capacity of the Agencies to address community concerns about aircraft noise issues through:
  - providing effective and balanced investigation and resolution of noise complaints
  - monitor and contribute to effective community engagement and provision of information on aircraft noise by the Agencies
  - promoting understanding, within Agencies, with individuals and the broader aviation industry, of the balance of relevant considerations in effective management of aircraft noise
  - identifying systemic issues raised in complaints and investigating, resolving and reporting on those issues promptly and effectively.
- Maintain awareness of and competence in best practice complaint management, administrative review and Ombudsman practice.

# Strategic Plan

1 July 2024 to 30 June 2027

## Environment, Risks and Opportunities:

The bulk of our work is complaints driven and responsive to community concerns. Demand for our services is determined, in large part, by the community's response to developments in flight paths, infrastructure, fleet and other changes and, in turn, by the Agencies' anticipation of and response to community concerns. It follows that there is a range of external factors and risks that will impact on our work and the demand for our services. These are beyond our control but recognised as challenges we face and must be prepared to meet. Factors that heighten risk include:

- Unprecedented scale of aviation infrastructure development over the foreseeable future, including changes to Defence northern bases, Western Sydney International Airport, and the new runways at Melbourne and Perth airports
- Flight path changes
- Growing community and political activity through social media requiring increased skill and capacity from Agencies in relation to community engagement
- Ongoing impacts of military exercises, including from changes to exercise locations
- Master Plan processes increasing community awareness of aircraft noise
- Government review of the aviation industry through the Aviation White Paper including changes in the political and regulatory environment
- Fleet mix changes (unmanned aerial vehicles, helicopters and light aircraft at smaller airfields, new services at noise-sensitive times)
- Maintaining a sustainable and flexible workplace
- ANO staff changes and succession.

## Measures of Success:

- The public is aware of our role and our services are fair and accessible to all.
- Our work is undertaken in a timely, effective and efficient manner.
- We communicate effectively and constructively with Agencies and with the public.
- Our recommendations are practical and effective.

**Linkages between the Strategic Plan, ANO Charter and Key Performance Indicators**

Strategic Plan	Charter	Activity	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Role and Functions</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the handling of complaints and enquiries made to the Agencies about aircraft noise.</li> </ul>	cl.9 (a)-(d) and cl.37-47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>receiving and acknowledging complaints</li> <li>undertaking initial assessment of the complaint to decide whether to review</li> <li>communicating with complainants</li> <li>assessing whether the relevant agency has appropriately managed the complaint</li> <li>explore opportunities to resolve complaints</li> <li>providing feedback to agencies on their complaint handling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Complaints not part of multiple complaints investigations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement of complaint within 2 business days</li> <li>Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction within 7 days</li> <li>Updates every 28 days</li> <li>Close by 1 month (benchmark 50%)</li> <li>Close by 3 months (benchmark 25%)</li> <li>Close by 6 months (benchmark 15%)</li> <li>Close by 12 months (benchmark 10%)</li> <li>Close later than 12 months (benchmark 0%)</li> </ul> <p><b>Complaints part of multiple complaints investigations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement of complaint within 3 business days</li> <li>Decision on whether complaint is within jurisdiction within 14 days</li> <li>Updates every 28 days</li> <li>Complete final assessment by 3 months (benchmark 25%)</li> <li>Complete final assessment by 6 months (benchmark 50%)</li> <li>Complete final assessment by 12 months (benchmark 25%)</li> <li>Complete final assessment later than 12 months (benchmark 0%)</li> <li>Close by 6 months (benchmark 50%)</li> <li>Close by 12 months (benchmark 50%)</li> <li>Close later than 12 months (benchmark 0%)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reporting and making recommendations to the Board or Chief of Air Force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly Reports 100% on time</li> <li>Reports on reviews of complaints within 12 months</li> <li>100% implementation of recommendations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor, report and contribute to the effectiveness of community engagement processes relating to aircraft noise undertaken by the Agencies.</li> </ul>	cl.9(e) and cl.71-79	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute to and review Agencies' policy and procedural framework for community engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of interactions with agencies</li> <li>100% response rate to provide feedback when requested</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attending and observing community engagement activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of community engagement activities attended</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>report on ANO engagement in those activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly Reports – 100% reporting on time</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attendance at CACG meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of CACG meetings attended</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor, report and contribute to the effectiveness of the presentation and distribution of aircraft noise-related information.</li> </ul>	cl.9(f) and 71-79	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide feedback during regular meetings with agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100% response rate to feedback when requested</li> <li>Quarterly Reports – 100% reporting on time</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake targeted reviews of aircraft noise management.</li> </ul>	cl. 80-83	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identify systemic issues raised in complaints and/or monitoring issues, agree terms of reference and undertake review and report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board/CAF agrees to terms of reference for targeted reviews</li> <li>12 months to undertake review and report</li> </ul>