

Aviation Safety

Key challenges

A safe aviation system is essential for community confidence and the future development of the industry. To maintain Australian aviation's excellent safety record the Australian Government and all aviation operators need to be equipped to meet the challenges of a growing and rapidly changing aviation market.

1. What issues should a 21st century aviation regulator be focussed on?

Response to this question from Angela Firth

Friday 27th June 2008

To Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Dear Sir/Madam

I would recommend that the main issue a 21st century aviation regulator should focus on is: **trainee pilots flying unsupervised over built-up areas.**

I live close to Parafield Airport in South Australia.

There appear to be no particular unregulated safety issues concerning normal commercial flights, and flights by licensed pilots, into and out of Parafield. However, I am extremely concerned that flight school pilots – trainee pilots – are allowed to fly above heavily built-up areas in an unsafe manner.

My home is at the point where two flight school circuit paths intersect. Often there will be small aircraft, piloted by learners, flying over at approximately 60 second intervals. This can occur all day and up until 11 at night. The frequency of flights increases after dark, and can be as frequent as one plane every 16 seconds. At times, aircraft headed west have to take evasive action to avoid aircraft, flying a different circuit, headed towards the north or south.

I have watched aircraft fly directly towards each other right above my house. So far, they have fortunately taken evasive action, albeit occasionally at the last minute.

On at least three occasions I have observed two aircraft flying directly towards my home in a close parallel formation and at the same dangerously low altitude. They peeled apart and flew to either side. It appeared that they were aware of each others presence and I suspect they were experimenting with formation flying.

Despite an 11 pm curfew, I watched a flight school aircraft repeatedly practise stall and recovery from 11.20 to 11.50 pm. This involved plummeting in a downward spiral directly above dense housing.

The trainee pilots fly too low. They struggle to turn whilst achieving altitude, and then they struggle to turn again to complete their overly tight circuits. The tortured sound of their aircraft engines is evidence that their flying does not comply with aviation safety rules.

It is reported that flight school aircraft do not have their transponders activated, and I believe they are not policed by air traffic control. This presumably means that they can deviate from approved circuit paths without detection.

We live in a country with an abundance of open space. It is unfair, illogical and unreasonable to put people on the ground at such a high level of risk simply for the convenience of the few.

You will recall the embarrassment caused to authorities by the recent Farnborough crash in the UK (30th March 2008). Local residents and management of the large public hospital directly under the flight path had complained of safety issues for many years. Aviation officials were left red-faced when an aircraft piloted by a fully licensed pilot crashed into housing killing all on board.

Accidents are inevitable with any forms of transport, but risk should and must be minimized.

I feel sorry for the official who will be expected to answer the difficult questions if/when a trainee pilot crashes.

You have the power to prevent this.

Do not allow pilot training to occur above built-up areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Angela Firth

This is a letter which was sent to The Telegraph:

Flying over suburbia

Sir - As a private pilot, I believe the tragic crash of a Cessna jet near Biggin Hill airport (report, March 31) should be a warning to national and local government as to the lunacy of airfield development requiring a flight path over the congested suburban areas of southern England.

Biggin Hill began life 90 years ago as a Royal Flying Corps wireless testing site close to London; but almost by stealth has now transformed itself into "Biggin Hill (London) International Airport".

It is now London's fastest growing airport. This has happened with no real consultation with residents or with the private pilots, whose small and generally safer planes have been forced out to make way for fat-cat jets.

With three schools and a major hospital in Biggin Hill's immediate flight activity area, we must be thankful that there was not a much greater loss of life in Farnborough village.

In my part of south London, I look up in amazement from my garden at the ceaseless stream of aircraft approaching and landing at City Airport. Not only is dense housing at risk, but there is also the danger of an aircraft accidentally hitting the financial complex at Canary Wharf.

Now is the time for the Government and Civil Aviation Authority to reconsider the risk levels of flight patterns and airport development over southern England before it is too late.

A remote fifth London airport with excellent transportation to the centre must be the only safe answer.

David Shaw, London SE9

Note: He may well mention 'small and generally safer planes', but he is not talking about aircraft flown by trainee pilots.