



Australian Government

The Australian Aviation State Safety Programme

Aviation Agency Emergency Response Roles and Responsibilities

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Acronyms and abbreviations

	Description
ABF	Australian Border Force
AEP	Aerodrome Emergency Plan
AGCMF	Australian Government Crisis Management Framework
AIG	Aviation Implementation Group
Airservices	Airservices Australia
AMSA	Australian Maritime Safety Authority
AMSA Act	<i>Australian Maritime Safety Authority Act 1990</i>
ANS	Air Navigation System
Annex(es)	Annexes to the Convention on International Civil Aviation
ANZCTC	Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee
APG	Aviation Policy Group
ATSB	Australian Transport Safety Bureau
AUSAVPLAN	Australian Government Aviation Disaster Response Plan
AUSCYBERPLAN	Australian Cyber Response Plan
AUSHEALTHRESPLAN	Australia's Health Response Plan for All-Hazards Incidents of National Significance
AUSSECPLAN	Australian Government Domestic Security Crisis Plan
BoM	Bureau of Meteorology
CASA	Civil Aviation Safety Authority
COMDISPLAN	Australian Government Disaster Response Plan
Defence	Department of Defence / Australian Defence Force
DFSB	Defence Flight Safety Bureau
DITRDCA	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
NATSAR	National Search and Rescue Manual
NCM	National Coordination Mechanism
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NSR	National Situation Room
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
SAR	Search and Rescue
SARPs	Standards and Recommended Practices
SRR	Search and Rescue Region
SSP	State Safety Programme
SSP-CAT	State Safety Programme – Cross-Agency Team

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

The *Australian Aviation State Safety Programme: Aviation Agency Emergency Response Roles and Responsibilities* (The SSP Emergency Response Guide) outlines the roles and responsibilities of Australian Government State Safety Programme (SSP) aviation agencies during aviation emergencies within the Australian Search and Rescue (SAR) Region.

This guide is provided as an appendix to Section 1.5 of the Australian Aviation State Safety Programme and supports Australia's implementation of ICAO Annex 19 – *Safety Management* by documenting national-level emergency response and crisis-management roles.

This appendix also supports Ministerial awareness by clearly identifying Australian Government agency responsibilities during aviation emergencies within the State Safety Programme framework.

Table C1: Australia's SSP agencies

Agency	Minister
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCA)	Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA)	
Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB)	
Airservices Australia (Airservices)	
Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA)	
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)	Minister for Foreign Affairs
Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs)	Minister for Home Affairs
Department of Defence (Defence)	Minister for Defence
Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)	Minister for the Environment and Water

1.2. Linkages to other Australian Government response plans

This appendix forms part of Australia's broader aviation emergency response and crisis-management framework as described in Section 1.5 of the Australian Aviation State Safety Programme.

Australia manages aviation emergencies within a whole-of-government crisis-management system, underpinned by the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) and supported by a range of national plans and standing arrangements. These frameworks establish how the Australian Government prepares for, responds to and recovers from crises, including aviation safety, aviation security and cyber-related incidents.

Within this context, this appendix:

- documents national-level aviation agency roles relevant to the SSP;
- clarifies how aviation safety responsibilities interface with broader crisis-management arrangements; and
- supports consistent understanding of agency responsibilities across government, including at the Ministerial level.

This appendix does not replicate or restate the content of national crisis-management frameworks or operational response plans. Activation thresholds, coordination mechanisms and operational command arrangements are described in the frameworks and plans referenced in SSP Section 1.5.

By articulating agency roles within the SSP context, this appendix provides continuity and transparency of national-level aviation emergency response responsibilities.

1.3. Australian Search and Rescue Region (SRR)

Australia is responsible for aviation search and rescue within a defined Search and Rescue Region in accordance with ICAO Annex 12. Detailed geographic boundaries and coordination arrangements are described in the National Search and Rescue Manual (NATSAR) and are not repeated in this guide.

1.4. Scope

For Ministers, this appendix provides role clarity and governance context only; it does not describe Ministerial decision-making processes or crisis-management actions.

1.4.1 The SSP Emergency Response Guide does:

Support emergency managers who undertake whole-of-Australian Government communications and coordinate resources within the Australian Search and Rescue Region (SRR) by providing clarity on national-level roles and responsibilities of the various departments and portfolio agencies that together implement Australia's SSP.

1.4.2 The SSP Emergency Response Guide does not:

Cover action resulting from aircraft incidents that are handled within standing jurisdictional or existing aviation incident response arrangements including:

- The national coordination arrangements in the AGCMF which may be used to support a response to an aviation safety or aviation security incident as an identified hazard under the AGCMF.
- Those defined under the '*Aviation Transport Security Act 2004* – Division 5 – Unlawful interference with aviation' (Department of Home Affairs).
- Aerodrome Emergency Plans, which outline the arrangements for an aviation incident within the precinct or vicinity of a certified aerodrome (CASA enforced).

- Australian NATSAR Manual, which outlines the search and rescue coordination arrangements for civil and military aircraft in distress and their occupants within the Australian Search and Rescue Region (National Search and Rescue Council).

For Ministers, this guide provides role clarity and governance context only; it does not describe Ministerial decision-making processes or crisis-management actions.

1.5. How this guide should be used

This guide should be used:

- to understand which agencies hold national-level responsibilities during aviation emergencies;
- to distinguish between aviation safety, aviation security, investigation and search and rescue functions;
- to support briefings and discussions on national aviation emergency arrangements; and
- to complement advice provided through established Australian Government crisis-management frameworks.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1. Ministerial roles

Australia's aviation emergency arrangements assign Ministerial leadership based on the nature of the incident, while preserving the independence of safety regulation and investigation.

2.1.1 Lead Minister determination for aviation emergencies

The AGCMF describes 14 possible hazards listed in its Appendix A (*Designated Lead Ministers, Lead Coordinating Senior Officials and Australian Government Coordinating Agencies for identified hazards*).

The nature of the hazard will determine the Lead Minister for the Australian Government's preparation for, response to and recovery from a crisis. Under the AGCMF, the Australian Government has the ability to change the Lead Minister and the Australian Government Coordinating Agency. It may be necessary for two or more ministers to co-lead and as an incident evolves the Lead Minister may transfer to a different minister, as appropriate.

When a crisis is novel or not designated in the AGCMF, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is the default Australian Government Coordinating Agency until such time as an appropriate Australian Government Coordinating Agency is agreed. The Minister responsible for emergency management is the default Lead Minister until such time that an appropriate Lead Minister is agreed.

Depending on the nature and scale of the crisis, the Prime Minister may decide to lead some or all elements of the crisis. When this occurs, the Prime Minister will advise which elements the portfolio minister will continue to lead on.

2.1.2 Role of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government during aviation emergencies

Transport Incidents – other than terrorism

The AGCMF provides the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has the lead role for transport incidents, other than terrorism, that require a whole-of-government response. This may include crashes of, and search and rescue efforts for, commercial aircraft (within Australia or the Australian Search and Rescue Region).

2.1.3 Role of the Minister for Home Affairs during aviation security-related incidents

Domestic terrorist incidents and domestic security-related incidents

Under the AGCMF, the Minister for Home Affairs is the Lead Minister for domestic terrorist incidents (suspected or declared) that require a whole-of-government response. This may include terrorism related aviation incidents.

A terrorist incident is an act, or threat to commit an act, that is done with the intention to coerce or influence the public or any government by intimidation to advance a political, religious or ideological cause, and the act causes:

- death, serious harm or endangers a person
- serious damage to property
- a serious risk to the health or safety of the public
- the serious interference with, disruption, or destruction, of critical infrastructure (including aviation)

The Minister for Home Affairs is also the Lead Minister for domestic security related incidents under the AGMCF, which may include significant acts of sabotage involving aviation. For this purpose, an act of sabotage has the same meaning as Division 82 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*.

2.2. State Safety Programme agency roles

This section reflects the responsibilities of Australian Government agencies, jurisdictions and non-government entities during aviation emergencies within the Australian SRR.

During aviation emergencies, responsibilities are deliberately distributed across agencies with distinct functions. Leadership, regulation, investigation, service provision and search and rescue are separated to preserve safety, accountability and independence.

2.2.1 Airservices Australia

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, Airservices Australia is responsible for providing air navigation and related services and identifying and escalating potential distress situations through the SAR alerting service. Airservices provides Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Services, the first responder to aircraft incidents at 27 aerodromes nationally, and executes the roles and functions required under legislation. Airservices does not exercise command of emergency response operations.

- Provides air traffic services, including monitoring scheduled aircraft from origin to destination, in-flight emergency response and assisting with incident investigation as required.
- Provides SAR alerting services for aircraft to the AMSA, Headquarters Joint Operations Command and/or state or territory police and helps to provide aeronautical communication services during SAR operations.
- Provides communication relay and coordination support to AMSA to enable effective air safety and SAR response.
- Assists Defence with SAR coordination for military aircraft in distress outside military-controlled airspace.
- For aircraft in-flight likely to make a forced landing or ditching, Airservices provides a parallel SAR response in coordination with the AMSA, as required.

2.2.2 Australian Maritime Safety Authority

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority is responsible for national aviation search and rescue coordination and does not regulate aviation safety or conduct safety investigations.

- Coordinates SAR operations for international civil aircraft, aircraft on the Australian Civil Aircraft Register and the Recreation Aviation Australia Register, and manned space vehicles in distress and their occupants.
- Passes SAR coordination to the federal, state or territory police service, once an aircraft in distress is located and all surviving persons from the aircraft are rescued, or it is agreed between AMSA and the relevant police service that the police are the best placed overall SAR coordination authority.
- Supports a jurisdiction following the declaration of an aviation disaster or emergency.
- Assists the Australian Transport Safety Bureau or Defence Flight Safety Bureau with any investigation.
- Provides SAR briefings to the Australian Government, DITRDCSA, Defence, ATSB, CASA, Home Affairs and others including Police, DFAT, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – biosecurity and trade, airline/airport operators and adjacent rescue coordination centres, as required.
- Provides an AMSA Liaison Officer to the Crisis Coordination Centre.

2.2.3 Australian Transport Safety Bureau

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau is responsible for independent, no-blame investigation and the preservation of safety evidence and does not direct emergency response activities.

- Has overall responsibility and command of accident investigations up to and including 12 nautical miles offshore, and beyond if an Australian-registered aircraft is involved.
- Acts in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Chicago Convention with regards to aircraft accidents occurring beyond 12 nautical miles off the coastline.
- Assists the investigation of accidents involving Defence aircraft, if requested.
- Upon an aviation crash or disaster, the ATSB or the Defence Flight Safety Bureau (DFSb) must be contacted so that rescue operations do not compromise investigation activities. The ATSB can provide relevant information to the rescue and recovery process.

2.2.4 Bureau of Meteorology

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Bureau of Meteorology is responsible for providing meteorological services and advice in support of aviation emergency response activities.

- Collaborates with emergency response agencies to provide forecasts, warnings and briefings to assist SAR operations.
- Assists the ATSB, Defence and CASA with aviation accident and incident investigations.

2.2.5 Civil Aviation Safety Authority

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority is responsible for aviation safety regulation and oversight and does not command emergency response or recovery operations.

- Undertakes regulatory investigations with a view to taking appropriate safety-related action pursuant to the CASA functions.
- Establishes airspace coordination during response and in some recovery aspects (particularly where aerial damage assessments are being conducted).
- Establishes restricted airspace of a temporary nature (temporary restricted area) to limit or control aviation activity in the interests of public safety, or to protect the environment as required.
- Provides appropriate technical support to other agencies.
- Supports and assists the ATSB accident investigation where necessary. This is separate and distinct from CASA's authority to carry out a regulatory investigation into the accident, which may be conducted in parallel to the ATSB's investigation.

2.2.6 Department of Defence

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Department of Defence is responsible for military aviation emergency response and cooperates with civil agencies where military and civil responsibilities intersect.

- Provides non-financial assistance through NEMA, under the provisions of Defence Force Aid to the Civil Authority and Defence Assistance to the Civil Community.
- Provides air traffic services, including monitoring scheduled aircraft operating in military airspace, in-flight emergency response and assisting with incident investigation as required.
- Provides SAR alerting services for aircraft to the AMSA, Headquarters Joint Operations Command and/or state or territory police and helps to provide aeronautical communication services during SAR operations.
- Responsible for emergency responses to the crash or ditching of military aircraft within the Australian SRR and civil aircraft operating at Defence or Joint user aerodromes, with the assistance of the other emergency response agencies and entities, as required.
- Conducts SAR for military and State aircraft (including visiting foreign military and State aircraft), and Defence operations.
- The Defence Flight Safety Bureau is responsible for investigating Australian military accidents, and subject to international agreements with visiting foreign military forces, support the investigation of foreign military aircraft accidents in Australia. DFSB operates under the authority and guidance of the Defence Aviation Authority, a position held by the Chief of Air Force.
- Upon a military aviation crash or disaster, the DFSB or the ATSB must be contacted so that rescue operations do not compromise investigation activities. The DFSB can provide relevant information to the rescue and recovery process.
- Assists the investigation of accidents involving civil aircraft, if requested.

2.2.7 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for consular and diplomatic support and does not lead domestic emergency response activities.

- Notifies foreign governments if their citizens are involved in an aircraft accident in Australia.
- Notifies next-of-kin of Australian citizens who reside or who are travelling outside of Australia.
- Provides consular assistance through Consular and Crisis Management Division (working with Australian overseas missions), if aviation disasters occur overseas and involving Australians or Australian interests.

2.2.8 Department of Home Affairs

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Department of Home Affairs is responsible for Australian Government coordination of aviation security and terrorism-related incidents and does not regulate aviation safety.

- Supports the Minister for Home Affairs by taking the lead role in Australian Government coordination if a national terrorist situation involving aviation is declared (under the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC) National Counter-Terrorism Plan). If an aviation incident involves sabotage, and is not terrorism, the Department may activate the Australian Government Domestic Security Crisis Plan (AUSSECPLAN) and coordinate the Australian Government's response.
- In response to an aviation security incident the Secretary of Home Affairs may issue a direction to control the movement of aircraft or require additional security measures.
- The Minister for Home Affairs may make authorisations relating to a cyber security incident for purposes of the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018*, including those impacting on aviation infrastructure.
- The National Cyber Security Coordinator (Coordinator) leads the Australian Government's response to the cyber aspects of the incident, supported by the National Office of Cyber Security and the Australian Signals Directorate, as outlined in AUSCYBERPLAN. If cyber is secondary, the Coordinator supports the lead operational agency by managing the cyber-specific impacts.
- Arranges visas for foreign carriers, victims and employees' families.

2.2.9 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

For the purposes of the State Safety Programme, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts is responsible for national aviation policy coordination and whole-of-government coordination during aviation safety-related emergencies.

- Supports the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government by taking the lead role in Australian Government coordination in the event a national aviation incident, other than terrorism, occurs.
- Provides support with respect to weight limits and curfew restrictions regarding the take-off and landing of aircraft used for the purposes of managing a national emergency.
- Maintains the voluntary Code for the Preparation of Airline Family Assistance Plans (Family Assistance Code) which sets out the minimum standards expected of airlines to provide distinct and sensitive treatment of victims, and the families of victims, of an airline accident involving loss of life, and serious injury.

2.3. Other key stakeholder roles

In addition to SSP agencies, a number of other government and industry stakeholders have defined roles during aviation emergencies. These roles support, but do not replace, national-level SSP responsibilities.

2.3.1 Australian Border Force

- Manages customs and border protection related issues with the affected aircraft and its passengers, baggage, cargo or stores, in particular identifying, safely handling and securing prohibited or restricted items.
- Manages the travel movements and immigration processing of passengers and crew and providing personal details of passengers and crew to authorised persons.

2.3.2 National Emergency Management Agency

- Provides briefings to the Minister responsible for Emergency Management with information provided by DITRCSDA, Airservices, AMSA, state or territory emergency authorities and other agencies as appropriate.
- Coordinates Australian Government non-financial assistance to the affected states and territories under the formal request arrangements prescribed within COMDISPLAN.
- Participates in the Australian Government response to a terrorist attack in accordance with the Australian Government Crisis Arrangements and the ANZCTC Counter-Terrorism Handbook.
- Ensures regular updates are provided to relevant Australian Government and state and territory government authorities via the NSR.
- Supports Australian Government assistance and logistics to support persons directly affected in conjunction with airlines, via the NSR.
- Facilitates shared situational awareness and provides a central point of communication between Australian Government agencies, airlines, industry as well as states and territories, through the NCM and the NSR.

2.3.3 Airport Operators

- Considers this guide when planning for emergencies and reviews it against relevant state or territory emergency management arrangements. Resolves any identified inconsistencies in consultation with the relevant agencies and records the agreed resolutions in the Aerodrome Emergency Plan.
- Establishes and maintains local arrangements for the provision of humanitarian assistance to passengers, their families, employees, and all other persons directly affected by an emergency.
- Provides passenger and relative reception facilities for incidents where the aircraft has departed from or was destined for their port, or at the request of authorities.
- Supports the staging of SAR aircraft at the request of authorities.
- Assists the ATSB and other authorised investigators with accident investigations as needed.
- Manages the aerodrome-related aspects of aviation accidents as detailed in extant plans.
- Provides and accepts liaison officers into Australian and industry crisis centres, or equivalent.

2.3.4 Airlines

- Provides assistance through family assistance plans to victims, and the families of victims, consistent with responsibilities set out in the Family Assistance Code.
- Makes best efforts to provide all available information on the aircraft and persons, particularly the passenger manifest, to emergency services.
- Develops and maintains family assistance plans consistent with the responsibilities set out in the Family Assistance Code.
- Manages the aircraft-related aspects of aviation incidents, as detailed in extant plans.
- Provides and accepts liaison officers into Australian and industry crisis centres, or equivalent.

3. Associated documents

- Aerodrome Emergency Plans
- *Airports Act 1996*
- *Air Navigation Act 1920*
- Air Services Regulations 2019
- Australian Cyber Response Plan (AUSCYBERPLAN)
- Australian Government Crisis Management Framework
- Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)
- Australian Government Domestic Security Crisis Plan (AUSSECPLAN)
- Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee National Counter-Terrorism Plan
- *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004*
- Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998
- Code for the Preparation of Airline Family Assistance Plans
- *Customs Act 1901*
- Cyber Incident Management Arrangements
- *Cyber Security Act 2024*
- *National Emergency Declaration Act 2020*
- National Search and Rescue Manual
- *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018*
- *Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003*

Contributing agencies and stakeholders

Airservices Australia
 Australian Border Force
 Australian Maritime Safety Authority
 Australian Transport Safety Bureau
 Bureau of Meteorology
 Civil Aviation Safety Authority
 Department of Defence
 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
 Department of Home Affairs
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
 National Emergency Management Agency
 Australian Airports Association Emergency Management Working Group

Version control

This document was edited with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot, a generative artificial intelligence tool, to improve clarity and readability. The final content has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts who remain responsible for its accuracy and completeness.

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Status of this document

This guide is issued as an appendix to Section 1.5 of the Australian Aviation State Safety Programme. It documents national-level aviation emergency response roles for reference and transparency and does not constitute an operational response plan.