

1 March 2011

Irene King  
Chief Executive  
Aviation Industry Association  
PO Box 2096  
Wellington 6140

Dear Irene

## **Pilot Radio Communications**

Some of our members, Wanganui in particular, have raised the issue of poor pilot radio communication protocol at airports where there is no ATC service. We bring the following to your attention in the interests of aviation safety.

At these airports, aircraft transmissions are recorded primarily for the purpose of obtaining information for invoicing landing fees. Notwithstanding, considerable difficulty is often experienced when attempting to recover the transmissions from the recording system as the standard of radio procedure is frequently poor with many important calls often unintelligible. Of particular concern is the inability of many student pilots, principally from overseas countries, to enunciate the phonetic alphabet and accordingly pass clearly their aircraft registration, or call sign, and the relevant information pertaining to their intentions. As an example, one aircraft recently arrived from Palmerston North, completed a series of touch and go landings, made a full stop for refuel, departed and returned some hours later to repeat the cycle before a final departure back to Palmerston North, yet the registration of that aircraft could not be identified from any of the dozen or so transmissions made by the pilot. Identification only became known when an accompanying aircraft made an advisory call to the effect it was following that particular aircraft on to the runway for take-off. Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident, but one repeated almost daily.

A second group of offenders is the "old/bold" recreational flyers who have become so familiar with their registrations that in transmission almost anything goes which results in a similar situation where identification is difficult.

While airports need to be able to identify those aircraft that land at the airport, and hence recover the appropriate charges, there is a far more serious aspect in that if the airport cannot readily identify aircraft registrations and call signs in the quiet of an office, and with the advantage of repeated "play-back" being available, then probably neither can other pilots operating in the same airspace as the offenders. The implications this poses for safety is potentially quite severe.

A second area of concern is the failure of operators to give the required calls when operating in the Mandatory Broadcast Zone. For example, the MBZ at Wanganui is a relatively small area within which frequent position reports and/or normal circuit calls should be expected. Again all too frequently these are sadly lacking. A “joining” call at some distance outside the MBZ, or a “downwind call” (with or without intentions) is often the only transmission received from some aircraft. During times of low activity the problem is exacerbated, as pilots may become lulled into the false belief that “silence” implies they are the only one operating and therefore the regular transmission of their position or intentions is unnecessary. Another frequent failure, generally by commercial operators, is a call at 25 – 30 miles (well outside the zone), but no with further calls unless another aircraft transmits in the interval. Given the time to landing can be 10 minutes or more the potential arises of other operators again being led to believe they are the only ones operating also and thus also hold back on their transmissions. Again the potential for series consequences arises.

In discussions with other unattended airports it seems these problems are not unique to Wanganui, but are quite wide spread.

Wanganui Airport has raised this matter with the CAA and TIAC but we think that your members would also value this feedback and would be well placed to support initiatives to improve this situation.

Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Ward', written in a cursive style.

Kevin Ward  
Chief Executive