

PRESS RELEASE

Aircraft Type Clubs rally forces to oppose CASA rule changes

Representatives of light aircraft type clubs covering almost 60% of Australian registered fixed wing aircraft – Beechcraft, Cessna, Mooney and Piper – met near Albury on 26 May.

Owners are concerned about recent Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) initiatives in the airworthiness area, which they say were implemented without proper cost/benefit analysis or adequate consultation with aircraft manufacturers, other national airworthiness authorities or local type clubs.

Most type club members are private owners who use their aircraft for private and business travel. Many are professionals such as medical specialists, GPs, dentists, mining engineers and IT specialists, who use their aircraft to reach their patients and customers in far flung parts of outback Australia. The clubs also keep their members up to date on flying safety and maintenance issues related to their aircraft types.

Members say recent CASA directives such as mandatory control cable inspections on Beechcraft aircraft have mandated substantial additional and un-necessary maintenance spending on an entire fleet of aircraft for little demonstrated safety benefit. They believe these moves have been implemented without a professional approach to cost/benefit analysis or consultation with aircraft manufacturers, other national airworthiness authorities, or local type clubs.

The meeting was the first of a series in which the type clubs will discuss how to join forces to improve services to their members and better represent the views of their members to the Government and to aviation regulators.

John Hillard, President of the Australian Mooney Pilots Association Ltd, says: “While CASA is rightly encouraging aircraft owners to be conscious of the need for more careful inspection of older aircraft, they are understood to be considering a requirement to replace certain aircraft systems after a period of years (such as overhaul of engines after 12 years, replacement of control cables after 15 years) without regard to how the particular aircraft has been operated, stored and maintained. However the specific examples CASA has used to justify these moves are aircraft with faults that appear to result from insufficient and/or inadequate maintenance rather than age alone”.

“CASA have not produced any evidence that airworthiness issues in ageing aircraft are a common cause of serious accidents. In their own analysis, CASA concluded that the main contributing factors in the vast majority of fatal general aviation accidents in Australia were pilot error, rather than aircraft structure or powerplant issues.”

The type clubs believe that CASA should:

- be challenged to provide solid evidence and proper cost/benefit analysis in their justification of future proposed regulatory changes;
- consult more with the airworthiness authorities in the country of manufacture (primarily the USA FAA) and be less inclined to take unilateral action to address perceived issues regarding the small proportion of the worldwide fleet that happen to be Australian registered;
- focus more on enforcing existing maintenance regulations for the minority of aircraft that are poorly maintained rather than requiring additional work on the majority of aircraft that are already well maintained; and
- adjust their regulatory focus to recognise that, in order for private owners to maintain their aircraft at reasonable cost, it is essential that maintenance spending be focussed on things that are critical to air safety and not just “nice to have”.

The type clubs also agreed to investigate other areas of possible co-operation, such as:

- Promoting the fact that the vast majority of private owners maintain their aircraft in good condition whether their aircraft are young or old. Attendees were concerned that recent CASA publicity gives the flawed impression that older aircraft are potentially unsafe;
- Working with AOPA to improve the flow of information to pilots on regulatory matters and to better represent their interests;
- Development of type-specific maintenance schedules that are reasonable and practical and include condition monitoring to ensure the ongoing integrity of aircraft systems;
- Combining the insurance schemes operated by some type clubs to reduce premiums and provide discounts for members who complete pilot safety programs; and
- Sharing ideas and teaching materials to further improve the pilot proficiency and maintenance programs run by the type clubs.

Type clubs represented at the meeting were the Australian Bonanza Society, Cessna Pilots Association of Australia, International Comanche Society, Australian Mooney Pilots Association Ltd, Australian Piper Society Inc. Other type clubs (Cessna 182, Pilatus and Business Aircraft Owners Association) have sought to become involved and will be invited to attend future meetings.

About the photo

The inaugural meeting was hosted by Andrew and Michelle Kotzur whose company Kotzur Ltd is a leading designer and manufacturer of silos for grain and other products. Kotzur operate two aircraft (a 2007 Mooney Acclaim and a Piper Navajo) that they use to service their customers around Australia as well as to travel to their other office in Toowoomba.

The meeting was held in the Board Room of their head office at Walla Walla, NSW. Their board table (pictured) is a remarkable piece of aviation history. It was originally owned by the Bristol Aircraft Company and the directors are believed to have met with Winston Churchill around it during WW2 to discuss the company contribution to the war effort. The British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) inherited the table when Bristol Aircraft merged with other aircraft companies in 1960 to form BAC. Around the same table, the BAC directors made the decision in the 1960s to build the Concorde. The table became surplus after some office redecoration and found its way to Adelaide and now finally to Walla Walla. Office re-designers have much to answer for!

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