

Parliament calls for CAA review



The Commons Transport Select Committee is asking for "a root and branch review" to examine the continuing need for the CAA and to find out whether its functions could better be carried out in other ways.

The Committee's own review of the CAA has concluded that while the aviation industry has changed beyond measure since the CAA was established in 1972, the CAA has changed little. It says that if a new aviation regulator were set up today, it is unlikely that it would be the shape of the CAA.

It says the government has been negligent in failing to undertake strategic reviews of the role, remit and objectives of the CAA, pointing out that no critical review of the CAA had ever taken place, contrary to the Authority's Sponsorship Statement.

It also laments the lack of follow-up on the quango's Regulatory Impact Assessments, none of which have ever been quality-tested, and calls on the National Audit Office to review a sample of RIAs to see how close they come to reality.

While the report contains some heartening proposals for general aviation, the CAA can be broadly satisfied with the outcome. The Select Committee concludes that it does a good job and generally gives good value for money. It adds that no examples were provided of the CAA charging too much for its services. It seems to have completely ignored the Helios

Report submitted by AOPA which specifies areas in which CAA charges are wholly disproportionate.

The committee also makes some odd gyrations in order to let the CAA off the hook. It rejects AOPA's claim that a Regulatory Impact Assessment was necessary before the CAA imposed new charges on general aviation and handed the cash to the airlines, but says that RIAs should be carried out in such circumstances in future.

The Committee finds a bogey-man in the shape of EASA, and is uncompromising in its condemnation of the Agency as a "chaotic" body which "is not able to fulfil its declared purpose." It has swallowed the CAA's line that it is the world's best regulator, and instead of calling for improved safety regulation simply seeks that everybody else in Europe settle for the UK's safety levels. As AOPA has often stated, more regulation does not equal more safety, and standards could be improved by reducing regulatory cost to improve pilot currency. While quoting in its final report Martin Robinson's submission that "the best safety device on any aircraft is a well-trained pilot," it makes no recommendations that would foster the idea.

In its report the Committee refers to aviation regulation as "an industry". Perhaps it is. It is certainly very profitable – the six percent profit the CAA is required to make (which the CAA

argues is not profit but "return on capital" for borrowings, for example, to build Aviation House at Gatwick, and to cover its pension liabilities) is greatly in excess of the 3.5 percent the government seeks from other similar regulators, and the committee recommends it should be "looked at". The committee also recommends that the quango "clearly demonstrates that it is avoiding the problems associated with this form of funding, namely failing to keep costs to a minimum, gold-plating, and failing to withdraw from unnecessary regulatory areas."

The question now is whether anything substantial will change. It's possible that with a little tweaking of its attitude, the CAA can carry on regardless. Things that need to be "looked at" will be "looked at" and probably found to be adequate; the most promising avenue for improvement will come from the involvement of the National Audit Office in studying the CAA's conformity with its Sponsorship Statement and the opacity of its finances, and from the possible establishment of an Ombudsman for aviation to whom CAA decisions could be appealed. ■



The CAA under the microscope

Martin Robinson explains the background to a review that allowed GA to have its say on the CAA

The redoubtable Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody MP chaired a team of ten MPs who were tasked by the House of Commons to examine the administration, expenditure and policy of the Department for Transport and its associated public bodies – including the CAA.

In 1972 the CAA was set up as an independent regulator responsible for safety, airspace, economic regulation and consumer protection. The Committee took evidence from 64 organisations and individuals, both written and oral. Since 1972 the civil aviation sector has grown from 0.7 million CAT movements in 1972 to 2.3 million in 2005, with passenger levels increasing from 57 million to 228 million. Interestingly, the report points out that although civil aviation has "undergone significant change" since the creation of the CAA, few adjustments have been made to the framework of the CAA. Page 4 of the full report says that: "the Government has been negligent in its failure to undertake strategic reviews of the role, remit, and objectives of the CAA as required by the sponsorship statement. We recommend that the Department for Transport carry out a root and branch review to examine the continuing need for the CAA and the extent to which its functions could be more effectively undertaken in other ways."

In mentioning the need for the CAA to examine itself, particularly with regard to how it communicates with the GA community, the Committee recognises the difficulties associated

with the changes being made at European level, specifically EASA. The Committee echoes CAA chairman Sir Roy McNulty's position in respect of the Agency in saying that it must be properly funded and resourced before its remit is extended. Funnily enough this is a common theme across Europe – almost all member states say they want EASA to succeed. The irony here is that it is up to the member states to make sure EASA succeeds by adopting robust political positions on the expansion of EASA.

The problem for European citizens is that most things coming out of Brussels (or Cologne) incur more bureaucracy and expense. We all seem to end up paying more for doing the same thing with no real measured improvements. The finding is that the UK has one of the highest safety levels, and the concerns are that harmonisation will lead to a lowering of safety standards for some. Of the 42 recommendations, two were specifically aimed at GA. In welcoming the two CAA reviews the Committee acknowledges the concerns of the GA community in respect of the bias towards the CAT sector, and over-regulation. The Committee supported the recommendations set out in the Strategic and Regulatory reviews.

The Committee noted with concern the potential for future skilled labour shortages in

aviation and urged the Government and the CAA to work with GA in addressing this issue. The report also spoke about the lack of Government involvement with the CAA in respect of keeping up with the changes going on in civil aviation. Hence the recommendation for a root and branch review.

On the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) the recommendation was to support European harmonisation but only if it "genuinely" assists all EU countries in matching the highest safety standards. The Committee voiced their concern about the "chaotic" state of EASA and recommended that the UK "cannot and must not transfer any further powers from the CAA to EASA until the Government is assured that the serious problems of governance, management and resources at EASA have been resolved". The minister has given such an assurance! The strange thing here is the UK was and still is supportive of EASA, yet it seems we have failed to influence Europe sufficiently on the

important issues of governance and resource. Unfortunately, it will be aviation that bears the brunt of this lack of political leadership.

The Committee noted the serious issue about CAA staff morale and uncertainties over the transfer of responsibilities ultimately resulting in a loss of experienced staff. The recommendation is for CAA and DfT to draw up a detailed assessment about the transition and to communicate it to their staff. I can recall a former senior CAA person saying: "We must keep the JAA going because it will need to pick up the pieces when EASA fails," and he was convinced it would fail. Well, we all know it

the concerns are that harmonisation will lead to a lowering of safety standards for some

will not be allowed to fail, but it is equally unrealistic to expect EASA to be where the UK CAA is in less than five years when CAA has been in business for nearly 35 years. The major problem with EASA is that no-one from the Commission or the member states drew up a realistic transition plan as I believe Europe thought that EASA was just another agency.



The Committee made suggestions about the performance of the CAA which the Authority may feel the need to rebuff – for example, recommendation for an independent body to consider appeals to decisions taken by the CAA, and the need for the National Audit Office to review a selection of Regulatory

Impact Assessments so that any lessons learnt are fed into future assessments. Your association has been calling for RIAs since 1992, prior to the introduction of JAR FCL. There is also a requirement for post impact reviews to be conducted two years or so after new regulations have been introduced. In noting that the CAA seeks to follow the firm principle of better regulation, the Committee expects to see evidence of it at some stage. It is obvious that the Committee feels that the RIA is a valuable tool, as they recommend that the CAA uses RIAs even when not legally required to do so. It has also been suggested that the NAO be granted access to conduct value for money and efficiency studies similar to those carried out for other regulators.

The Committee picked up on the CAA's scheme of charges and its impact on the GA community and raised concern about a comment that was made by another group that "some pilots may choose to fly outside the law". The recommendation was that the Government and CAA "carefully monitor the

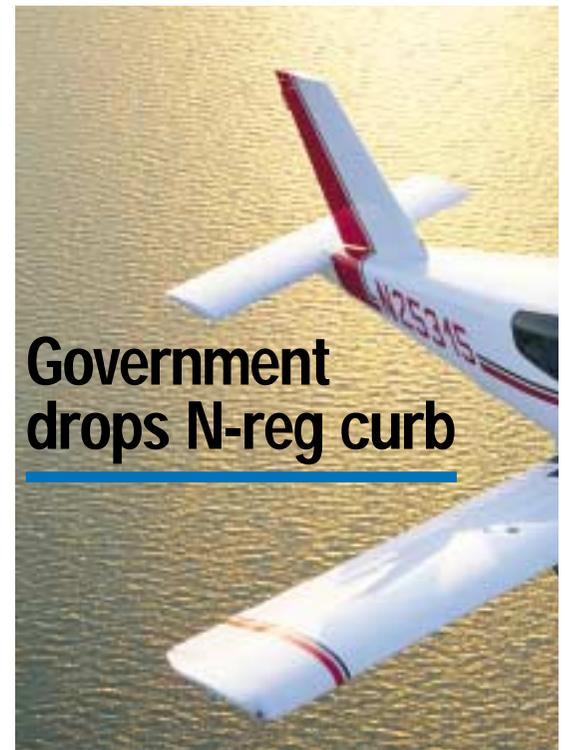
impact of the changes and take action when necessary to ensure that charges are fair and equitable and that operators in the GA sector are not unduly affected."

Overall, the Committee believes that the "CAA on the whole offers a good service". Rather surprising perhaps for some but it is set against a backdrop of change and lack of Government direction in respect of its own evolution. From a personal point of view I think the Committee did a good job in reviewing the work of the CAA – some may think it went too far, others not far enough. There are many good people employed in the CAA who I am sure will seek to use the recommendations to make changes that enable the CAA to meet the challenges it will face in the coming years as EASA grows.

Finally, I would like to thank many of you who submitted written evidence to the Committee and to my colleagues Mark Wilson (BBGA) and Paul Draper (PPL/IR Europe) who attended with me, on the 18th January 2006, and were brave enough to face Mrs Dunwoody and her Committee to give oral evidence. ■

Who deserves recognition?

In the October issue of *General Aviation*, members were invited and urged to submit for consideration the names of worthy candidates for AOPA's prestigious achievement and endeavour awards. These will be decided towards the end of December, so there is still time to put names forward (see page 10 of October GA for details).



Government drops N-reg curb

The government has decided not to move against foreign-registered aircraft based in the UK after a protracted and often acrimonious debate.

Plans to restrict the number of days such aircraft could remain in the UK to 90 or even fewer have been abandoned, with the government saying EASA will have to deal with the "problem".

Consultation on the proposal was marked by an unprecedented level of abuse, all of it counter-productive. In several meetings with Department for Transport civil servants involved in the proposal, AOPA was told they

Chief executive's diary:

Which way's north, and other thorny questions

This diary is a repository for all the stuff that's going on that doesn't warrant a separate magazine story, so I'll refrain from writing about the Commons Select Committee's review of the CAA and the government's welcome volte face on foreign registered aircraft. Both of these have taken up a certain amount of time this month, but most of the work goes into committees, meetings and presentations that have no conclusion and produce no demonstrable advantage, and no story.

So here's how I spent my time on your behalf this month. Going back to September 15th we had an Industry Consultation Body meeting in Brussels, mainly concerned with Single Sky matters. The airlines aren't satisfied with the results of the Impact Assessment with regard to the charging scheme; the smaller commuter airlines face increases in en route charges of about five percent a year. For business aviation, charges should fall by 2.1 percent, and of course we've fought hard to maintain the status quo on the exemption for aircraft under two tonnes. That has now been ratified, in the face of all airline objections. It's good to see our work paying off.

On the 20th we had the Aviation

Regulation Conference, a follow-up from the one last year in Edinburgh. The message coming out of it is that everyone wants EASA to work, but that it shouldn't get more responsibility until it is properly resourced. General aviation was not asked to give a presentation but thanks to David McMillan, who is Director General for civil aviation at the Department for Transport and who moderated the conference, I was able to raise some GA matters in the Q and A session at the end. Foremost among these was the problem we have with continuing involvement in SESAR, Europe's future airspace system. IAOPA-Europe has already pledged 500,000 euros to be part of the consortium working on the definition phase of SESAR, but some in Europe want us to pay 250,000 euros a year to take part in the next phase. That, of course, is beyond our means – and at the conference the European Director General Matthias Ruete agreed that if we are asked to pay this amount of money, it would be a "great folly".

On the 21st I had a meeting with CAA man Alex Trevitt, from the aerodrome standards division of the Safety Regulation



Group. He has some very good ideas for encouraging mutual education between pilots and air traffic controllers. ATC people used to get a PPL as part of their training, but that was ditched years ago to save money. Of the three ATC colleges now operating, only one offers students 15 hours flying experience so they

can understand the job from both sides of the fence. Many students don't even avail themselves of that, perhaps because it's offered at a time when their workload is very high. I feel that some flying experience would be beneficial and should be mandatory, even if it's only an hour.

We had our AOPA AGM on the 25th, and I'm pleased to say AOPA has moved into profit this year for the first time in some years. Membership is up by ten percent, which reflects well on everyone who works so hard for the Association. The more resources we have, the more work we can do.

Next day we had the AGM of NPPL Ltd, the company that runs the National Private Pilots Licence. The number of NPPLs issued has flattened out, and we discussed ways of promoting the licence. On the 29th I went to Warsaw for the regular IAOPA-Europe Regional Meeting, and held discussions with Arunas Degutis, the



had been subjected to personal invective which would be difficult to forget – so much so that early in 2006 AOPA chairman George Done issued a call for civility through this magazine.

The DfT, however, accepted that only a small number of people had overstepped the mark, and it would be unfair to allow bad feeling to inform their choices.

AOPA's approach, based on 40 years of dealing with government departments, was to set out the reasons why the alleged problem had arisen and propose alternative courses of action. Indeed, in its final response the

Department says: "However, the Government has also taken note of the many constructive responses suggesting that Government action should instead focus on the reasons why people choose to place their aircraft on the US register and on disincentives to UK registration."

In 1989 AOPA warned the government that the adoption of JAR-FCL would lead to a flight from the UK to the US register, but the warning was dismissed. The CAA's own Regulatory Impact Assessment said the effect would be "nugatory", and this has turned out to be wholly wrong.

With more than a thousand UK-based aircraft now on the US register, DfT concern about safety has grown. The FAA candidly admits it cannot offer to overseas-based aircraft the level of safety oversight the UK government would like to see. The DfT's "nightmare scenario" is of an N-registered GA aircraft causing significant damage or death in the UK, with both the CAA and the FAA effectively washing their hands of it.

But AOPA has maintained that moves to change the ANO in order to force these aircraft back onto the UK or European register were misconceived, and that the root causes of the flight from the G-register must be addressed. The government's final response reflects that approach.

It says: "Respondents emphasised in particular the perceived difficulty for holders of private pilots' licenses of achieving an Instrument Rating in the UK under the prevailing JAR-FCL Instrument Rating requirements; the costs and commercial disadvantages of placing aircraft on the UK register; the relatively fewer aircraft and parts that are certified by the CAA as compared to

the FAA or other Authorities; and the widespread recognition and acceptance of FAA licenses and certificates worldwide.

"The feeling among these correspondents was that rather than Government introducing a limit on the activities of foreign registered aircraft, incentives should be introduced for owners to register their aircraft on the UK register. Many respondents suggested they would move their aircraft to the UK register should CAA certification of aircraft and parts become more extensive and the process of obtaining an Instrument Rating be made more readily achievable."

EASA is of a like mind; in an interview with this magazine in 2005, its executive director Patrick Goudou said it was his intention to ensure that there were no advantages to being on the N-register. Although he was reluctant to expand on how that might be achieved, it was clear he was not thinking of penalising those who forsook European registry; rather, he was thinking of addressing the root causes of registry-shopping.

Chief among these is the Instrument Rating. Last year, IAOPA's proposal to revisit the requirements for the IR were accepted by the JAA, and working groups have been paring down the theoretical knowledge requirements, which are universally seen as over-engineered for the job. The current situation where fewer than one percent of UK PPLs have an IR (in America the figure is 50 percent) is unsafe and unacceptable. However, there are significant voices in Europe arguing for the status quo, and progress on the IR revision has not been as rapid or as comprehensive as IAOPA would like.

For reasons that are hard to fathom, European authorities react to the FAA IR like

chairman of AOPA Lithuania who is also a Member of the European Parliament and through whom we are keeping tabs on developments and influencing policymakers in various areas. We have a new chairman for IAOPA-Europe, Rudy Gerber from AOPA-Switzerland, who takes over from Klaus Zeh of AOPA-Germany; we all wish Rudy the best of luck in the job.

I was back on October 3rd for lunch with the above-mentioned David McMillan. The conversation ranged over a number of topics, from 8.33 kHz radios to – as always – Mode-S. David was until recently president of the Provisional Council that oversees Eurocontrol, so he has a grasp of both the technical and political aspects of all these things.

On October 5th I was at NATMAC, the air traffic management committee, where we debated – what else – Mode-S, as well as the never-ending airspace claims of provincial airfields, the new controlled airspace at Bristol and the situation at East Midlands, Nottingham Coventry and elsewhere. On October 9th I was at a seminar at the Royal Institute of Navigation on whether aviation should adopt true north rather than magnetic north as the basis for navigation. We're happy to keep the status quo, but the airlines would like to see us move to true north – their flight management systems could easily cope with the change, and they would have an easier life in higher latitudes where variation can be huge and changes quickly. For GA, a change would mean re-

equipping with new compasses and learning how to use them – they'd have a bezel on which you'd dial the variation as it changes – as well as rewriting the manuals and unlearning what we've been teaching up to now.

On the 10th I had a meeting with a chap called John Hammond, who has an aircraft valet service and is looking at discounts for AOPA members. More on that perhaps later. Next day I was at West Drayton for a discussion on airspace changes north-east of London, in the Clacton area, to improve the flow of London-area traffic. Our concern on behalf of our Instrument rated members is that all the changes are based on PRNav capability, which not all GA aircraft operating in Class A airspace have; they have agreed that any changes will have to take account of that fact.

On the 13th I was at the DfT for an update session on the Single European Sky; not much new in it, but we had confirmation of what we already knew about the two-tonne exemption. On the 19th we had the second session of the CAA's Airspace Safety Initiative Steering Group, a group bringing together all military and civilian airspace users. AOPA represents all of general aviation on the Group, and reports back to other organisations through the General Aviation Consultative Committee.

On the 20th we had the first meeting of the General Aviation Strategic Forum, which is chaired by Mark Wilson of the BBGA and for which AOPA provides the

secretariat. This is the outgrowth of the CAA's GA Strategic Review, and we went through the Strategic and Regulatory review documents and mapped out a way forward. We think four meetings a year will be needed to address the requirements of the Strategic Review.

On the 24th I attended a briefing of the Parliamentary Aviation Group ahead of their meeting with CAA chairman Sir Roy McNulty, and on the 30th I had a meeting with Lloyds brokers who have an underwriter who's interested in offering discounts to pilots with AOPA Wings. On November 1st I met with the Opposition aviation spokesman, Julian Brazier MP – see the separate story on these pages – who's laying down useful Parliamentary questions on vocational training. Next day I met with a group of AOPA members I'd first met at the World Assembly in Toronto – they're all City figures and could be very useful to your Association.

We had another meeting at the Royal Institute of Navigation on the 13th, this time on GPS. We're working together on a small programme on GPS use for VFR flying. It could lead to a credit towards the RadNav course, which in turn provides a credit towards the IMC rating. This is where we run out of time and have to send the magazine to the printers – there are meetings coming up this week with GasCo, BBGA, the GACC and the DfT which I'll report back on in the next issue.

Martin Robinson



vampires to sunlight. In a bizarre coda to its response, the UK government says:

"Respondents should note, however, that EASA will need to establish instrument rating requirements that are appropriate for European operations and weather conditions, and that previous work by experts indicates that requirements based on the FAA instrument rating would not be

acceptable for an instrument rating which gives access to class A airspace."

This is, frankly, bonkers. Europe's class A airspace is full every day with thousands of FAA IR holders flying everything from light aircraft to 747s, and there has never been any correlation between the accident rate and the wording of their tickets. And the notion that European weather is non-negotiable by pilots who can otherwise fly from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico via Greenland is similarly specious. Nonetheless, attempts to improve safety by taking some of the how-many-megaphones-are-required-on-a-747 nonsense out of the IR syllabus will continue to meet resistance.

Overall, the result of this consultation has been a good one. AOPA CEO Martin Robinson says: "The government is to be congratulated for listening to the industry's position and taking it fully into account." He believes that any changes to the current system will not come soon. "EASA is distracted with many other matters, and it is unlikely to move on this until it has settled down its Ops and Licensing functions," he said, "so I wouldn't expect to see the situation change for some years – unless, of course, that 'nightmare scenario' changes the game." ■

Tory move on flight training

Conservative aviation spokesman Julian Brazier MP has tabled a series of Parliamentary questions on general aviation which indicate a growing concern for the health of the flight training industry in the UK.

Brazier is seeking Department for Transport statistics on the issue of licenses – private and commercial – over the last 20 years, and is particularly interested in finding out how JAR-FCL has affected all types of flying training.

For some time Brazier, the MP for Canterbury, has been looking at training systems in shipping and aviation, his areas of responsibility as a shadow minister. As part of his research he sought a briefing from AOPA's Martin Robinson on trends, opportunities and problems in general aviation.

After the meeting Martin said: "Mr Brazier was especially interested in the situation pertaining to vocational training in aviation. I was able to set out for him some of the practical difficulties faced by British students when compared with their foreign counterparts.

"I used the example of a Dutch student at a British commercial flight training school who would be using a government-backed low-interest bank loan to fund his training, who would be able to claim back all of the VAT and write off the entire costs of his course against tax over the first seven years of his employment. The British student in the next seat would be paying his own way, get no VAT back and never be able to reclaim a penny of his training costs. With integrated courses costing perhaps £60,000 and type ratings and ancillary costs taking the bill over £100,000,



Left: Tory aviation spokesman Julian Brazier

that's a serious problem for young Britons.

"I cautioned Mr. Brazier about the Treasury's attitude towards tax relief and incentives for flight training, talked through the NVQ problems of the 1990s and stressed the differences between private and commercial flight training with regard to VAT."

Brazier is a former paratrooper whose interaction with aircraft is largely confined to abandoning them, although he has had brief hands-on experience at the stick with friends from the US National Guard. Member of Parliament for Canterbury since 1987, he served as an officer in the Territorial Army for 13 years. He has taken a special interest in the merchant marine during his political career, and is now extending that concern to aviation. A former Parliamentary Private Secretary to Gillian Shephard when she was a

Treasury Minister and Secretary of State for Employment, he resigned to fight Armed Forces cuts. He has been a member of the Defence Select Committee since 1997 and has held the shipping and aviation portfolio since May 2005.

He is an opponent of excessive restriction on adventurous activities which provide opportunities for learning to manage risk. After his private members bill to protect volunteers in adventure training, sport and other areas was blocked, he established an All-Party group for Adventure and Recreation in Society ('A RISC' for short), with Lib-Dem pilot and hang-glider, Lembit Opik, and ex-rugby international Derek Wyatt, Labour MP for Sittingbourne.

His concerns reflect the stated position of AOPA, which believes that the doctrine of "safety at any cost" may suit commercial air transport, but could be self-defeating in general aviation, if it leads to a collapse in UK pilot numbers.

In his questions, he asks the Secretary of State for Transport:

1. To list the number of pilots trained in the UK in the last 20 years by nationality.
2. To say how many pilot's licenses of all types were issued in the UK ten years ago, compared to the most recent year for which figures are available.
3. To deliver to the House (a) a copy of the original Regulatory Impact Assessment on the introduction of JAR-FCL, and (b) a copy of the post-introduction assessment.
4. To say how many UK pilot held multi-engine examiner authorisation ten years ago, and how many hold that authorisation now.
5. To say how many commercial licence flight examinations are now conducted at weekends. ■

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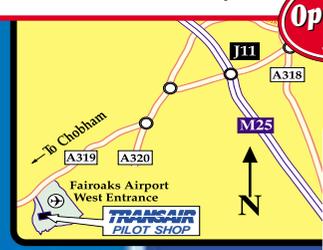


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The £500 million wrong answer

Europe's air navigation service providers are again attempting to force all aircraft owners to install 8.33 kHz radios – a move which AOPA says is a half-billion-pound solution to a simple organisational problem.

For more than four years AOPA has been fighting the proposal to extend the requirement for 8.33 kHz radios to all aircraft. It is currently required for those flying above FL195. There have been successes in the past, with Eurocontrol announcing in 2004 that there would be no move until alternatives had been explored, but the issue refuses to lie down. Now, the Germans and the French are again pressing for a new mandate.

Eurocontrol says the air traffic control system requires another 2,500 frequencies to cope with increased demand in the coming years, and some air navigation service providers say the only answer is to move away from the current 25 spacing on radios and adopt 8.33 kHz, which would triple the number of frequencies available.

Radios cannot be modified – the narrower spacing requires upgraded filtering technology – so every owner and operator would have to buy new equipment. The vast majority are of course combined nav/com units, which makes the proposition even more expensive. Dr Michael Erb, managing director of AOPA Germany, is leading the campaign against 8.33. He calculates that the total cost of moving to 8.33, including ground infrastructure, would be in excess of 700 million euros for the entire European fleet – almost half a billion pounds.

AOPA says there are more than enough frequencies available now to cope with any foreseeable expansion, if only they were used properly. At the moment every country in Europe allocates its own frequencies, and even though they liaise with each other there is a huge amount of overlap, duplication and wastage. Too many frequencies are allocated but unused, and when a frequency is established it is supposed to have a protected range of 300 nm. AOPA's solution is to replace some 32

radio allocation offices with one, and make frequency allocation a pan-European responsibility. Understandably, that is not a popular suggestion among those whose jobs and empires would be at stake.

IAOPA has looked particularly closely at the situation in Germany, which has the highest densities of frequencies of any European country. (The problems are largely confined to the core of Europe, while fringe countries like Finland, Portugal and Greece have no difficulties). Dr Erb produced a

frequency reassignment with a simple assignment algorithm that showed that an extra 30 percent of frequencies can easily be made available. With Eurocontrol claiming that it needs only 20 percent more, their requirements can certainly be met by better frequency management.

As a first step, IAOPA-Europe is calling for a full audit of all frequencies currently allocated in Europe in order to find out what is being used, by whom and for what. National allocation agencies are infuriatingly tight with data and it's virtually impossible for outsiders to find out what's going on. Large segments of the spectrum seem to be unaccounted for. IAOPA wants all radio agencies to open their books to scrutiny. Once that has been done, a central housekeeping plan can be devised to make best use of what's available. The possibility of extending that portion of the spectrum used by aviation – something the UK Radio Communications Agency says would not be difficult – should also be investigated if necessary.

Britain's National Air Traffic Services supports the 8.33 plan, but it has yet to convince the CAA's Directorate of Airspace Policy – which is fortunate because an alliance of Britain, Germany and France in Europe usually means a done deal. AOPA UK's chief executive Martin Robinson says: "NATS will of course do as it is directed by the DAP, which is saying that 8.33 is not yet necessary all the way to the ground in UK airspace. But if Europe decides otherwise, we'd have no alternative but to go along with it.

"A further complication, and another reason why the 8.33 proposal should be abandoned, is that digital radios are on the horizon, perhaps as early as 2015. One-on-one speech communication is pre-war technology and is a very inefficient way of transferring data between an aircraft and the ground. Digital radios offer vast improvements in safety by facilitating the transfer of data with far less risk of misunderstanding, as well as opening up virtually unlimited numbers of voice channels. The pilot or owner who is forced to change to 8.33 radios tomorrow will be forced to ditch them in favour of digital radios within a few years. With all these facts in mind, IAOPA says 8.33 kHz is the wrong solution for the industry, and we will continue to fight it." ■



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The never-ending story

Many problems remain regarding the availability of aerodromes for use by the general aviation sector, and AOPA continues to play the lead role in endeavouring to ensure that there will be facilities for the future. However, whilst one member wrote recently to complain that we fail to publish sufficient information about this work, another (a strip owner) stated that by revealing his planning problems we had damaged his situation at a sensitive time in the negotiations. Therefore, knowing that we cannot satisfy all the people all the time, we present here what should be a safe – if brief – report for all concerned. While in most cases detail may be missing, the references to specific sites should confirm that AOPA is involved in one way or another.

At the heavier end of the scale, Exeter Airport is being sold by Devon County Council and preferred bidders have been nominated; Leeds, Bradford and Nottingham (Tollerton) are to be sold by the relevant local authorities and in each of these cases AOPA has been asked to ensure that suitable facilities are available for unrestricted use by GA. Perth's future is being questioned as there are plans for extensive building on the site. A broadly similar situation applies at Sherburn-in-Elmet due to a proposed development right on the aerodrome boundary. A smaller aerodrome that may need to close due to termination of the lease is Cromer (Northrepps), but the operator hopes to be able to move the activities to a new, nearby site.

More airstrips threatened by possible windfarms now include Feam (Ross-shire), East Wynch (King's Lynn) and Shotton (Peterlee) and others are expected. As evidence of the scale of the problem the Directorate of Airspace Policy has produced Civil Air



Publication (CAP) 764 – CAA Policy and Guidelines on Wind Turbines. This is an extensive document that covers all aspects of the issue and is available from the Stationery Office, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN or in electronic format at www.caa.co.uk/publications.

AOPA has been asked for guidance on safeguarding by Perranporth and Great Massingham (Norfolk) and the latter had been wrongly advised that this protection is not available for unlicensed aerodromes. Despite numerous objections on flight safety grounds, planning permission has been granted for warehousing on the end of the main runway at Wellesbourne and an application by Tatenhill for some essential improvements for the benefit of GA has been refused.

Questions have come to AOPA regarding planning or operational issues at Inverness, Lincoln, Oban, Sloothby, Dunsfold, Fort Augustus (Inverness-shire) and three others that we have been asked not to mention at this stage. We have agreed to provide support for a proposed re-opening of a part of Tangmere.

AOPA provides a unique service on behalf of UK GA and is the only aviation organisation to do so. Your Association recognises that without an adequate spread of available flying sites throughout the UK, the value of operating an aeroplane is seriously diminished, so first-aid help is available to anyone who has or expects problems, or who just seeks advice. More detailed support, of course, must be restricted to AOPA members.

To avoid possible delay, issues should be raised directly with me at AOPA, 50a Cambridge Street, London SW1V 4QQ, david@aopa.co.uk. Please, though, make contact at the earliest possible stage, as many people have struggled on alone or have been given false advice (see above) and mistakes are not always easy to disentangle. We are keen to help! – *David Ogilvy* ■

Fly! to Silverstone

As revealed in *General Aviation* earlier this year, the Fly! Show is moving away from Earl's Court and will be held next year at Silverstone. The event will move from mid-April to July 13th to 15th, one week after the F1 British Grand Prix.

The show has always been successful at Earl's Court, but it is a high-cost venue and the problems of turning success into cash have led the organisers to make the change.

One of the major difficulties has been in getting aircraft into the middle of London – removing wings, reassembling the planes and doing the whole job in reverse two days later. At Silverstone the organisers expect to have ten times as many aircraft on static display, and there will be flying displays on the Sunday.

The great advantage of Earl's Court was that it was on the Tube and could attract the kind of people who wouldn't normally turn up at an airfield. Fly's marketing manager Sean Curtis says: "One of the major strengths of Fly! is its ability to deliver a new audience to general aviation, people interested in buying aircraft, learning to fly or looking for careers in the industry. Clarion Events is committed to continuing this remit. Silverstone is a regular destination for high net-worth individuals and the partnership presents many exciting new opportunities to open general aviation up to an even larger audience"

Aerobatic scholarships

The British Aerobatic Association – a corporate member of AOPA – has set up the British Aerobatic Foundation to encourage young newcomers to the aerobatic art. The aim is to award training scholarships to two very gifted pilots in their twenties, a plan that is to be strongly encouraged, but to achieve this the Foundation is in need of more funds; any reader willing to make a contribution should contact David Cowden at Merryfield House, 5 Wrens Warren, Chuck Hatch, Maresfield, East Sussex TN7 4WW, or via email on dc.aeros@tiscali.co.uk

There have been 30 applicants during the 2006 season: five of these were shortlisted and two were awarded scholarships. Intensive aerobatic flying training will start in late March 2007 and there is every hope that they will be able to enter the national championships at medium level in September.

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