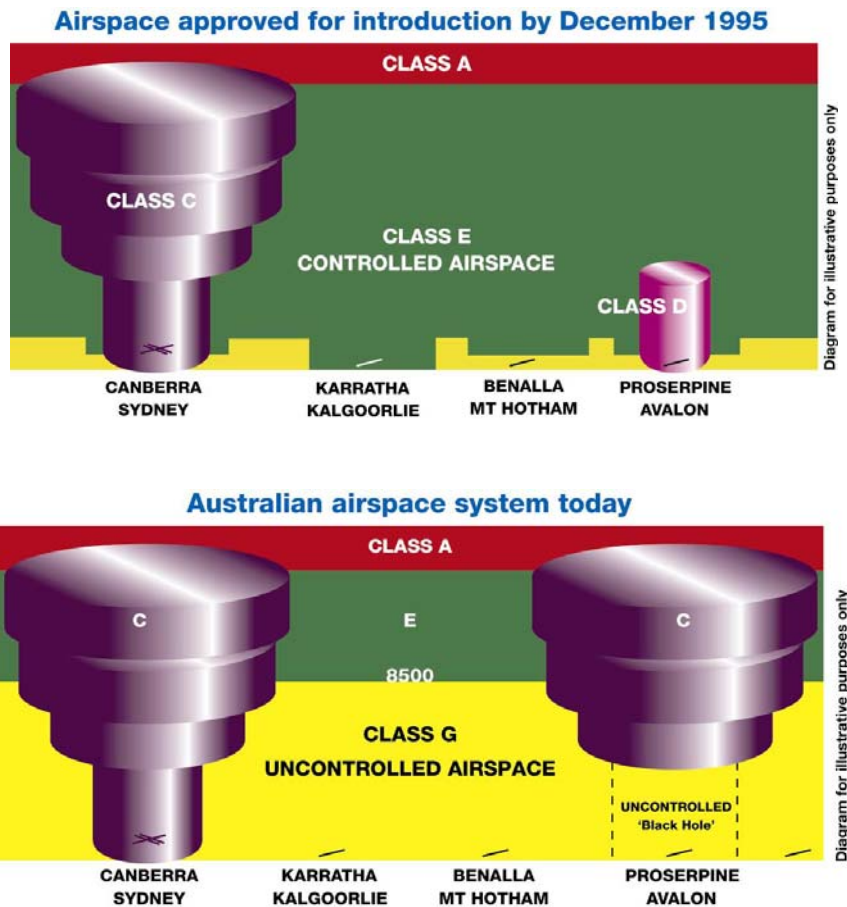


UNSAFE SKIES

By Dick Smith

In a 13 month period Australia has suffered an increasing commercial accident rate with the loss of 24 lives in aircraft all flown by professional flight crews in uncontrolled airspace. In addition, two serious airline incidents went close to killing a further 105 people.

This paper addresses possible causes and links the increasing commercial aviation accident rate to the failure of Government airspace and regulatory reform.



Based on an address by Dick Smith at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, on Tuesday 22 November 2005

SYNOPSIS

The commercial aviation accident rate in Australia is increasing. During a thirteen month period 24 lives have been lost in “Controlled Flight Into Terrain” accidents. In addition, two serious airline incidents could have resulted in a further 105 fatalities. In all cases the aircraft were flown by professional flight crews.

The paper links the accidents to the resistance by professional flight crews to airspace and regulatory reform. The reforms were to maximise the use of controlled airspace and radar, as well as to allow local aerodrome radio operators to give information to pilots. The current system relies on uncontrolled airspace and pilot to pilot radio calls.

Also addressed is a conflict of interest issue. The organisation with responsibility for the safety regulation of airspace also makes a profit from that airspace, and the decision makers’ remuneration is linked to that profit.

The paper addresses possible causes for the increasing commercial aviation accident rate and links this to the failure of the Government to implement the Cabinet approved airspace and regulatory reforms.

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Dick Smith

Dick Smith learnt to fly in 1972 gaining his Command Instrument Rating in 1983. In 1991 he qualified for one of most specialised ratings of all, the approval to fly a jet aircraft as a single pilot.

Dick Smith has flown a total time of 8,500 hours including over 1,000 hours single pilot jet time. He has made five flights around the world as pilot in command. Each of these flights has succeeded on time and as scheduled because of meticulous planning and thorough risk management.

Dick Smith was appointed to the CAA Board in 1988 and was appointed its Chairman in 1990 by the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. As Chairman of the CAA, his Board and Management made major policy decisions including a change in direction to purchase a modern “Two Centre” radar based air traffic control system using a proven design. The decision was also made to move to an international airspace system.

Dick Smith was appointed the Chairman of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority by the Transport Minister, Mark Vaile, in 1997. After the Aviation Reform Group was dissolved by John Anderson in November 2004 he now has no formal position in relation to aviation reform.

Over a fifteen year period, Dick Smith has travelled the World and met with the leaders of air safety regulation in the USA, Canada, UK, New Zealand and France. During this time he has gained an extensive knowledge of airspace design.

He holds the United Kingdom’s Guild of Air Navigators Sword of Honour, the Australian Oswald Watt Medal and the United States Lindbergh Award. In 1999 he was awarded the Order of Australia for his service to the Australian aviation industry.

Dick Smith is genuinely concerned about aviation safety in Australia. He is also concerned that important air traffic reforms that were started by the Hawke Government in 1990 have not been completed.

Prepared by Max Hazelton OBE AM