

NARCAP Investigator Support Paper IS-03  
NARCAP IS-03, 2012

## UAP and Aircraft Safety in Australia – A Review

Keith Basterfield

June 2012  
Copyright

### Introduction

One of the approaches taken overseas to move away from “traditional” UFO research, has been to replace the term “UFO” (unidentified flying object) with the term “UAP” (unidentified aerial phenomenon) and link it to aviation safety, e.g. the U.S. based National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP) (1)

### Australian Government Agencies

Up until 1995, in Australia, the responsibility for aviation safety lay with the federal government Department of Civil Aviation. In July 1995, that Department was abolished and replaced with two separate government bodies, namely, Air Services Australia and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

Air Services Australia “Is a government owned corporation providing safe, secure, efficient and environmentally responsible services to the aviation industry.” (2)

It has responsibility for:

- Airspace management
- Aeronautical information
- Aviation communication
- Radio navigation aides
- Aviation rescue and fire fighting services.

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) is an independent statutory authority. Its mission is “To enhance and promote aviation safety through effective regulation and by encouraging the wider aviation community to embrace and deliver high standards of safety.” “CASA’s primary function is to conduct the safety regulation of civil air operation in Australia...” (3)

A third player in the aviation safety area in Australia, is the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. “The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is Australia’s national transport safety investigator.”(4)

“The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is Australia’s prime agency for the independent investigation of civil aviation accidents, incidents and safety deficiencies. The ATSB is governed by a Commission and is entirely separate from transport policy makers, industry operators, and from transport regulators such as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA.) (5)

#### Near misses with UAP

Overseas, there have been reported near misses between aircraft and UAP, thus raising concerns about the safety of aircraft. If such incidents have happened here in Australia, where should we look for details about the incidents?

A search through the websites of Air Services Australia; the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, determined that one answer appears to be the ATSB’s listing of “Aviation Safety Investigations and Reports.” (6) This database currently lists 3,929 incidents which have been investigated. Examples from this list are:

- Collision with terrain
- Turbulence event
- Collision with obstacle.

Of particular interest to us are incidents such as:

- Airprox – VH-PWQ/Unknown, PA-34/unknown near Avalon Airport, Victoria 22 May 2012
- Airprox – Beech A36, VH-IOL and an unknown aircraft, 49kms Scone Airport NSW 26 September 2011.

“Airprox” meaning that an aircraft and something else (usually another aircraft) came closer than they should have been.

Before 2004, the report headings merely list the aircraft involved. Thus, there is no way to tell, without opening each report, if the event was an airprox. The earliest report listed is from 1969.

#### The ATSB’s former OASIS database

In 2004, this author submitted a FOI request to the ATSB asking for any reports involving the term “UFO.” The following are examples of their response.

- Occurrence number 197703195. Occurrence id 77512. 16 Apr 1977. Near King Island, Tas. UFO report from pilot. Passed to RAAF to study. CFT beacon abeam VH-KRY. Cessna 401

- Occurrence number 197802563. Occurrence id 70857. 21 Oct 1978. Near Cape Otway, Vic. Plt reported UFO then rough running eng. TX ceased. ACFT missing. Cessna 182L
- Occurrence number 198300234. Occurrence id 40550. 7 Apr 1983. Near Manly West, Qld. No known aircraft or balloon activity in area. Inside radar coverage but no radar return. UFO reported silvery object size of Cessna without wings flying from east to west at 2000ft
- Occurrence number 199804923. Occurrence id 164236. 8 Nov 1998. 28km NE Perth Aerodrome, WA. The pilot reported an unidentified flying object, bright red/orange in color. 100ft below and traveling very fast as the aircraft passed 9000ft. The object was approximately 2 metres across and the pilot believed it may have been a model aircraft.

#### New ATSB database

In 2007, the ATSB introduced a new aviation safety database, the “Safety Investigation Information Management System” (SIIMS.) The current ATSB website provides (7) weekly tables of “Occurrences entered into the ATSB Aviation Safety Database.” There are currently 22 pages of tables dated back to 2003. Each table lists dozens of occurrences, ranging from “an aircraft entering restricted airspace without a clearance” to “during the landing roll, the aircraft struck a bird.” Most occurrences do not result in an ATSB investigation, meaning that they do not make it to the “listing of Aviation Safety Investigations and Reports” mentioned above.

An examination of the “Occurrences entered into the ATSB SIIMS database, found numerous examples along the lines of:

20 Oct 2006 2006/06277. 20km NW Gold Coast Aerodrome, Qld. “An unidentified aircraft was observed on radar to have entered controlled airspace without a clearance.”

In each instance of this example which I examined, it was always “an unidentified aircraft” and no other wording. These instances do not receive further investigation.

#### In conclusion

If a near miss between an aircraft and a UAP has happened in Australia, and it was reported as an occurrence to the ATSB, we would expect to find a record of it in either the ATSB’s SIIMS database, or their listing of “Aviation Safety Investigations and Reports” or both.

In order to test out this hypothesis, I have submitted a Freedom of Information request requiring the ATSB to search their databases for such reports.

---

References

- (1) <http://www.narcap.org> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (2) <http://airservicesaustralia.com/about> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (3) <http://www.casa.gov.au> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (4) [http://www.atsb.gov.au/about\\_atsb.aspx](http://www.atsb.gov.au/about_atsb.aspx) accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (5) <http://www.atsb.gov.au/aviation/aviation-safety.aspx> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (6) <http://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/safety-investigation-reports.aspx?mode=Aviation> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
  - (7) <http://www.atsb.gov.au/aviation/weekly-summaries.aspx> accessed 7 Jun 2012.
- 

The author may be contacted by email at [keithbasterfield@yahoo.com.au](mailto:keithbasterfield@yahoo.com.au)