

Media release

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Air route structures reviewed by internal taskforce

A revised air route structure between Melbourne and Cairns is now in place as part of ongoing efforts by Airservices to make the safety of the Australian travelling public its highest priority.

It follows a broader review of air routes nationally by Operation Skysafe, an internal taskforce set up by Airservices in late 2013 to reassess procedures and management of airspace.

Reporting directly to Airservices Chief Executive Officer, Ms Margaret Staib, Operation Skysafe is examining airspace management to determine how the safety and efficiency of existing air routes can be enhanced.

Air route structures are sometimes described as ‘highways in the sky’, and allow commercial aircraft to fly predetermined paths between major cities.

“The taskforce undertook a body of work which has resulted in the duplication of the main, busy flight path between Melbourne and Cairns,” Ms Staib said.

The revised route sees aircraft fly on parallel paths, rather than be assigned different altitudes on the same two-way route.

“With more than 400 aircraft flying this route each month, the removal of the existing two-way route structure which had been in place for many years improves safety for all air travellers as well as creates additional capacity to cope with future growth,” Ms Staib said.

The revised route will also create efficiencies for airlines by reducing the distance aircraft will fly, thereby reducing fuel burn and emissions. For example, Virgin Australia has indicated that this change will deliver a saving of 7675 track miles and 34 500 kilograms of fuel per year.

Airservices has also developed a new, customised training program to build capabilities for air traffic controllers following a recommendation from the taskforce.

The taskforce is headed by Mr Paddy Goodall, Airservices recently appointed Chief Air Traffic Controller (CATC), an experienced air traffic controller who has worked as a controller in Australia and internationally.

Operation Skysafe continues to assess air routes nationally, and to investigate opportunities to adapt existing conflict detection technology and maximise the benefits of modern satellite navigation fitted to airlines.

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