



**Office of the Chief Executive**

GPO Box 367, Canberra ACT 2601  
25 Constitution Avenue, Canberra ACT 2600

t +61 2 6268 4182

f +61 2 6268 5685

[www.airservicesaustralia.com](http://www.airservicesaustralia.com)

ABN 59 698 720 886

**BY EMAIL**

[mathiesonc@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:mathiesonc@theaustralian.com.au)

Mr Clive Mathieson  
The Australian  
GPO Box 4245  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr Mathieson

Your article yesterday 'Houston gave wrong impression on rules around airport fireys' (15 July 2015) makes inaccurate and misleading claims that are damaging to the good reputation of Airservices and our Chairman Sir Angus Houston.

We have identified at least four serious misrepresentations and imputations in the article which require immediate correction.

1. The article and headline falsely imply that Sir Angus Houston has misled in relation to the regulatory requirements surrounding the provision of radio services at airports. This is untrue. *The Australian's* misleading and unethical presentation of selective parts of a statement is consistent with your recent series of inaccurate, false and misleading articles that contain statements and imputations which are not true and do not amount to fair comment on a matter of public interest.

Sir Angus' statement to *The Australian* makes the point very clearly that a person providing air traffic information to pilots must be qualified, that our firefighters are not, and that we consider this would detract from their primary role. The full statement that Sir Angus made on this matter was:

"The regulator (CASA) has decided that if anybody is to provide air traffic information to pilots in a regional context, they must be suitably qualified people. Our fire fighters are not trained in that way. Moreover, we want our firefighters ready to respond to any incident or rescue requirements, not handling the radio." ('Dick Smith is wrong on air safety: Houston,' *The Australian*, 26 June 2015).

The article in *The Australian* yesterday selectively used only part of this statement such that a reader of your newspaper is likely to interpret and apply a different meaning to that quote in light of the context in which it was presented.

Specifically, the article in *The Australian* yesterday stated that:

"Airservices Australia chairman Angus Houston gave the impression that fire crews employed by his body at regional airports would not be lawfully allowed to provide potentially life-saving weather and air traffic information to pilots, when an avenue is available for them to do so."

This statement was followed with the selective report of Sir Angus' actual statement as follows:

"The regulator (the Civil Aviation Safety Authority) has decided that if anybody is to provide air traffic information to pilots in a regional context, they must be suitably qualified people. Our fire fighters are not trained in that way."

Airservices rejects the assertion and imputations you have made by selectively quoting part of this statement, presenting it as Sir Angus' position in a different context, and then claiming a "wrong impression".

We seek an immediate retraction of this claim and a public apology to Sir Angus for the damage to his reputation.

2. The article claims a discrepancy between Airservices comments and the position of Ballina Airport in relation to whether the airport has ever sought the aviation rescue and fire fighters to provide a Unicom service. We stand by the information that we provided to *The Australian* that Ballina Airport is not seeking a Unicom service and that Airservices continues to enjoy a strong and collaborative relationship with the airport's management. We understand that Ballina Airport has also written to your journalist to set the record straight on this.
3. The article wrongly asserts: "Only when it became clear Airservices was not going to budge did he [Ballina Airport Manager] surrender on that front and move to hire retired air traffic controllers for the purpose." This totally misrepresents the status of our relationship and discussions with Ballina Airport. As we have advised *The Australian* on at least three separate occasions, we are working closely with Ballina Airport to develop the most appropriate and cost effective options for providing radio information services.
4. The article also misrepresents Airservices in relation to the provision of weather services to pilots both generally and in relation to Ballina Airport. Comments provided by Airservices in relation to weather have been reported out of context and selectively quoted to create a false and misleading impression.

Airservices statement to *The Australian* in relation to the article 'Radical overhaul to deliver safer skies' (Weekend Australian, 11 July 2015) was:

"A comprehensive suite of weather information services is available to all pilots both before and during any flight in Australia through services provided by the Bureau of Meteorology in conjunction with Airservices. This includes automated weather services available during flight **as well** as services provided by air traffic controllers over the radio." (*emphasis added*)

Your article yesterday reported the following:

"Airservices has also claimed it and the Bureau of Meteorology provide a 'comprehensive' weather service to pilots because airports without air traffic controllers have automated weather stations, a statement aviation experts describe as ludicrous."

In addition, the article asserts in the context of Ballina:

"Airservices said 'a comprehensive suite of weather information services is available to all pilots... this includes automated weather services' which convert weather readings to voice for pilots. But a US expert in air traffic control who has spent time in Australia, Jeff Griffith, said the automated services could only relay information from the precise point the device was located, not talk about weather dangers visible many kilometres away."

Airservices never claimed, in relation to Ballina or any other airport, that automated weather stations alone are a comprehensive solution but rather that these stations form part of a comprehensive suite of weather services. Your selective truncation of a statement provided in another context again misrepresents Airservices position.

The implication that pilots have only automated weather services available is wrong as additional weather information is available from controllers on request.

We ask again that you refrain from making inaccurate and misleading claims, that you publish corrections at the earliest opportunity and that future articles are a fair and balanced reporting of the facts.

We have now provided extensive factual material in response to almost 200 questions since 29 May 2015 in relation to a series of articles that you have published as part of this self-acknowledged "sustained campaign." This letter is the seventh we have written to you in relation to 11 articles that contain inaccurate and misleading claims about Airservices.

We have given *The Australian* every opportunity to correct the record in relation to issues that we consider to be in contravention of the *News Limited Code of Conduct* and the *Journalists Code of Ethics*. In light of the sustained inaccurate and false reporting by *The Australian*, this conduct would appear to be malicious. Airservices is now considering its position on these matters.

Airservices has had a good working relationship with *The Australian* prior to this campaign and the reporting in recent weeks has been disappointing. It is certainly not what the public would expect of *The Australian*. These articles contribute to unnecessary concern for the travelling public when Australia's aviation safety is among the best in the world.

Airservices respects the role of the media and remains willing to engage in public debates that are factual, balanced, respectful and make a positive contribution to the ongoing improvement in aviation safety in Australia.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Staib  
Chief Executive Officer

16<sup>th</sup> July 2015