

Safety Bulletin

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RESPONDING TO ATC TRANSMISSIONS

Airservices recently conducted a Normal Operations Safety Survey (NOSS)¹ across Upper Airspace Services (UAS) air traffic control group. The NOSS consisted of 12 observers who conducted 89 observations of approximately one hour duration across Airservices' Melbourne and Brisbane centres. These centres are responsible for the provision of air traffic services across the entire Australian FIR. The survey used the Threat and Error (TEM) framework to identify threats² to the safe conduct of operations.

The results of the NOSS identified that threats relating to Pilot Communication were noted in 71% of observations and that these accounted for 33% of all consequential threats³. The most frequent threat observed was 'Pilot failure to respond to call' which was noted during 37% of observations. This rate is the second highest of all results in the global air traffic control NOSS archive. Two of these threats led to the controller making an error.

Although the NOSS focussed on Airservices UAS delivery environment, the threat relating to pilots not responding to ATC transmissions exists across all types of airspace.

Failure to respond to ATC transmissions not only increases the workload on the controller, but can directly and indirectly lead to them making an error. There have also been examples of incidents that, although the pilot failure to respond to ATC transmissions was not identified as a causal factor, had the pilot acknowledged ATC at the first attempt, the incident may have been avoided.

Airservices understands that there are many factors which affect a pilot's ability to hear and/or acknowledge ATC transmissions. This Safety Bulletin highlights the threat 'pilot failure to respond to call' introduces to the safe provision of ATC services.

For more information

For further information please contact Airservices Safety Liaison:
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¹ NOSS is based on the Line Operation Safety Audit (LOSA) methodology which is commonly used across the aviation industry.

² Threat is defined as an event or error that occurs outside the influence of the controller, but which requires his or her attention and management if safety margins are to be maintained.

³ Consequential threat is defined as a threat that is linked to, or induces controller error or an undesired state.