Australian Government
Civil Aviation Safety Authority

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

Proposed changes to aerodrome rescue and firefighting services legislation (Creation of new Part 176 of CASR)

Project number: AS 07/14 **File ref:** D23/354868

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1 Overview

CASA is reviewing the aerodrome rescue and firefighting services (ARFFS) standards and is proposing policy changes in the development of a new standalone Part 176 of the *Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998 (*CASR) to replace Subpart 139.H of CASR.

On 13 July 2023, CASA published the 'Proposed changes to aerodrome rescue and firefighting services legislation (creation of new Part 176 of CASR) - (PP 2101AS)' for consultation. The recommendations from Department of Infrastructure and Senate reviews, along with additional opportunities to modernise the ARFFS ruleset with an increased focus on performance-based approaches, have been considered in the development of the policy proposals.

The CASA review identified six broad policy areas, which included 24 specific policy change proposals:

1. Functions of ARFFS.
2. ARFFS establishment criteria.
3. ARFFS establishment requirements.
4. Graduated ARFFS.
5. Removal of prescriptive regulatory requirements.
6. Modernisation of ARFFS standards.

The proposed changes apply to existing and prospective ARFFS providers, accredited ARFFS training providers and aerodrome operators, and are intended to provide a stronger safety focus through:

- better alignment of safety regulations governing ARFFS with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Standards and Recommended Practices, Procedures for Air Navigation Services and guidance material
- a clearer definition of the role and functions of ARFFS, to ensure ARFFS providers can perform their core functions and prioritise non-aviation requests
- defined aerodrome responsibilities in the establishment and provision of ARFFS
- clearer ARFFS establishment/disestablishment requirements and timeframes
- location specific ARFFS resource (staffing and equipment) and training requirements, based on aircraft operations and aerodrome factors.

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our offices are located and their continuing connection to land, water and community, and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Artwork: James Baban.

2 Reference material

2.1 Acronyms

The acronyms and abbreviations used in this summary of consultation (SOC) are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Acronyms

Acronym	Description
AC	advisory circular
ARFFS	Aerodrome Rescue and Fire Fighting Service
CASA	Civil Aviation Safety Authority
CASR	*Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998*
FSCC	fire station communications centre
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
MOS	Manual of Standards
OIC	officer in charge
PP	policy proposal
TRA	task resource analysis

2.2 Definitions

Terms that have specific meaning within this SOC are defined in the table below. Where definitions from the civil aviation legislation have been reproduced for ease of reference, these are identified by 'grey shading'. Should there be a discrepancy between a definition given in this SOC and the civil aviation legislation, the definition in the legislation prevails.

Table 2: Definitions

Term	Definition
aerodrome	an area of land or water (including any buildings, installations and equipment), the use of which as an aerodrome is authorised under the regulations, being such an area intended for use wholly or partly for the arrival, departure or movement of aircraft
airport	an airport in Australia
ARFFS	aerodrome rescue and fire-fighting service
rescue and fire fighting services	services provided in accordance with Division 4 of Part 2 [of the *Airservices Regulations 2019*].

2.3 References

Legislation

Legislation is available on the Federal Register of Legislation website https://www.legislation.gov.au/

Table 3: Legislation references

Document	Title
CASR Subpart 139.H	*Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998*

3 Respondents

3.1 Executive summary

The consultation revealed substantial stakeholder engagement with detailed technical and operational feedback across 24 proposals that were set out in Policy Proposal PP 2101AS. While some proposals received broad support (particularly those improving clarity and removing unnecessary prescription), others generated concerns about safety implications, international alignment, and practical implementation.

This summary does not respond to the issues raised, however, it reflects the views expressed. It focuses on areas where multiple responses expressing similar views have been made.

3.1.1 Key overarching themes

Several cross-cutting issues emerged across multiple proposals:

ICAO alignment concerns

Multiple respondents expressed concern that proposals move Australia further from ICAO compliance rather than closer. Specific examples included higher passenger thresholds than comparable countries (Canada: 180,000 vs Australia: 350,000), graduated services creating extended periods below required standards, and various proposals reducing standards rather than strengthening them.

Cost vs safety

A dominant theme from ARFFS providers/personnel and firefighters was that the proposals prioritise cost reduction over safety enhancement, characterising the emphasis as being on reducing costs rather than improving safety.

Regulatory oversight

Concerns were raised about regulatory effectiveness, with multiple references to not addressing the 2019 Senate Inquiry findings of inadequate oversight, unlimited exemptions granted without enforcement, employment relationships creating potential conflicts, and need for proper funding and staffing of regulatory functions.

Prescriptive vs outcomes-based

Respondents raised the tension between removing prescriptive requirements (generally supported) and ensuring adequate standards are maintained. Many respondents supported outcome-based approaches in principle but emphasised need for clear minimum standards, robust oversight, and transparency.

State/territory fire service implications

There were concerns raised about increased demands on already-stretched services, response time differences (15+ minutes vs 5 minutes), capability gaps for specialised aviation incidents, and need for formal consultation, Memorandums of Understanding, and potential funding increases.

Staffing and resourcing

Concerns about adequate staffing emerged as fundamental, with references to proper task resource analysis (TRA) methodology and transparency, historical staff reductions without safety justification, the need for Domestic Response Service at major airports, and current understaffing compromising both aviation and non-aviation responses.

General themes

Clear demographic patterns emerged in responses. ARFFS providers/personnel and firefighters provided the most detailed, substantive responses based on operational experience, emphasising safety concerns with specific examples, opposing changes seen as cost-reduction measures, and demanding transparency and effective regulation. Aerodrome operators had mixed responses depending on size and location, seeking clarity on responsibilities while supporting performance-based approaches. Aviation consultants focused on regulatory efficiency and supported flexibility; while opposing oversight of matters they considered outside core aviation safety. Aviation industry representatives emphasized passenger safety and wanted certainty about service levels. State fire authorities sought detailed consultation on implications and resource demands.

Safety themes

Several substantive safety issues were raised. These included:

- restricting ARFFS functions could increase response times (from 5 minutes to over 15 minutes)
- coverage gaps may occur during early morning operations and during graduated establishment/disestablishment periods
- Australia's standards may fall below those of comparable countries, raising concerns about international alignment
- equipment and training quality could decline if oversight is inadequate
- staffing levels may be insufficient due to flawed risk analysis methods
- poorly implemented technology could reduce operational capability
- foam testing at standard temperatures may not result in adequate performance in high-temperature Australian conditions.

Top priorities identified

Safety-related priorities included ensuring adequate staffing resources through proper task resource analysis, ICAO compliance and adequate training standards. Operational clarity priorities focused on clear definition of ARFFS functions, defined roles and responsibilities, transparency about services provided, and appropriate establishment/disestablishment triggers. Regulatory approach priorities emphasised performance-based outcomes where appropriate, simplification while maintaining safety standards, effective oversight and enforcement, and stakeholder consultation.

3.2 Summary of comments

3.2.1 Functions of ARFFS

Proposal 1 - Amend the ARFFS functions to be primarily aviation-related

The primary concern was ambiguity around defining aviation-related versus non-aviation incidents. Multiple respondents questioned whether incidents in terminals, car parks, or airport infrastructure would be considered aviation-related. ARFFS providers/personnel emphasised their current capability to handle both types without compromising primary functions, citing examples of medical emergencies, car fires, and grass fires that improved safety and operations. Aviation consultants supported focusing on core functions, while aerodrome operators had mixed views. Several ARFFS providers/personnel raised concerns that restricting functions could delay responses requiring immediate intervention, noting State/Territory fire services have longer response times (15+ vs 5 minutes), potentially compromising safety. Aviation industry representatives noted concerns about emergency response gaps, particularly for medical emergencies in terminals. State fire authorities requested further consultation on implications.

Proposal 2 - Introduce ARFFS priority response area requirements

The 1,000-metre threshold from runway threshold generated debate about why this specific distance was chosen rather than aligning with ICAO standards or allowing site-specific determinations. Some airports noted critical aviation infrastructure may sit outside this boundary. ARFFS providers/personnel noted they already respond beyond 1,000 meters for water rescue operations and fires affecting tower visibility. One airport raised concerns about runway approaches over built-up areas, requesting flexibility for responses beyond 1,000 metres for aircraft incidents.

Proposal 3 - Introduce constraints for non-aircraft and non-aviation related ARFFS operations

This proposal generated considerable commentary about an increased burden on State/Territory fire services, potential safety gaps, and operational complexity. Concerns were raised about response time differences, capability gaps, and whether State services have capacity to absorb additional demand. Multiple ARFFS providers/personnel provided examples where rapid response prevented escalation, noting that waiting 15+ minutes for State services could result in loss of life or property damage. One location highlighted their situation providing both ARFFS and territorial fire services with the same staff, noting challenges in prioritising aerodrome operations when threats exist outside the aerodrome. State fire authorities requested detailed consultation on service expectations and resource implications.

3.2.2 ARFFS establishment criteria

Proposals 4 & 5 - Introduce a single ARFFS establishment triggers

While many supported removing the international/domestic distinction, concerns were raised about the 350,000 passenger threshold potentially removing ARFFS coverage from international airports with lower passenger volumes. Multiple respondents noted that Canada's threshold is 180,000 passengers (half of Australia's) and New Zealand requires ARFFS for aircraft with 30+ passenger capacity with 700 movements in the busiest 3-month period. Several submissions noted that passenger numbers don't necessarily correlate with risk profile, arguing for case-by-case risk assessments. A significant issue raised by multiple helicopter operators was that the proposal focuses solely on fixed-wing scheduled operations, completely excluding commercial helicopter operations. Several helicopter operators noted moving 15,000-17,000 passengers annually via helicopter. One airport was specifically highlighted with heavy offshore helicopter operations (4-7 flights daily carrying up to 19 occupants) departing before ARFFS activates, creating higher risk periods without coverage.

3.2.3 ARFFS establishment requirements

Proposals 6 to 9 - ARFFS establishment requirements and timeframes

Most respondents agreed aerodrome operators should be accountable for ensuring ARFFS when triggers are met, though concerns were raised about whether this should be an offence. The 3-month timeframe after Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics publication was criticised as too long, with multiple respondents noting that operators and Airservices Australia (AA) are aware of passenger trends well before publication. Concern was expressed that allowing case-by-case determinations would lead to inconsistent standards and delays. The combination of proposals was seen as potentially allowing up to 27 months (3 months + 12 months establishment + 12 months graduated) before compliant ARFFS would be operational. References were made to past struggles with establishment in required timeframes, though respondents noted these should be addressed through better planning, not regulatory flexibility that compromises safety.

Proposal 7 - Default requirement for Airservices Australia to provide ARFFS

This proposal generated polarised responses. Arguments supporting Airservices Australia as sole/default provider emphasised economies of scale, national consistency, ability to cross-subsidise smaller locations, and career development pathways. Arguments supporting contestability focused on potential cost savings and flexibility. Multiple ARFFS providers/personnel raised concerns that private operators might compromise safety through reduced training, lower-quality equipment, insufficient staffing, and inability to maintain services during financial difficulties. One submission noted that major airports run at a profit and enable other stations to operate at a loss. If major airports were taken by private operators, remaining network sustainability would be compromised.

3.2.4 Graduated ARFFS

Proposal 10 & 11 - Graduated ARFFS establishment and disestablishment

Opposition centred on concerns that graduated services would institutionalise sub-standard provision for extended periods. Multiple respondents emphasised that if ARFFS are required based on aircraft types and passenger volumes, operating at a lower category creates an inherent safety gap. Several submissions noted graduated services might be acceptable if there's clear evidence a full service cannot be established despite appropriate efforts, there's a detailed safety case, and there's certainty about maximum timeframe. For disestablishment, state fire authorities raised concerns about their capacity to handle increased demands, noting local services would be left holding the risk. Several respondents questioned whether risk actually changes proportionally with passenger numbers.

3.2.5 Removal of prescriptive regulatory requirements

Proposal 12 to 15 - Removal of prescriptive requirements

Aligning vehicle colour requirements with ICAO standards was broadly supported. Most respondents agreed with aligning complementary agent reserve supplies to ICAO standards (100% vs 200%), though some noted that current reserves are important for remote/regional locations. For inshore rescue boats, mixed responses emerged with supporters noting flexibility based on operational needs, while opponents argued UV exposure and weather deterioration could compromise equipment reliability. Several emphasised that water rescue service boats contain critical safety equipment that could be rendered unusable between scheduled checks if exposed to elements. Multiple respondents opposed allowing training facilities off-aerodrome, noting current practice has on-site training enabling regular, frequent sessions. A concern around removing on-site training capability and the impact this could have on training frequency and currency was also highlighted.

3.2.6 Modernisation of ARFFS standards

Proposal 16 - Defined roles and responsibilities

This proposal received strong support. Clearly defining aerodrome operator versus ARFFS provider roles for facilities, infrastructure, and ongoing provision was seen as addressing current ambiguities. Some aerodrome operators noted requirements should be reflected in development plans, jointly determined by ARFFS provider and the aerodrome operator to ensure operational effectiveness, and include clear maintenance responsibilities. One airport noted that critical infrastructure like operations centres may be outside the 1000-metre threshold but still require an ARFFS response.

Proposal 17 - Fire Station Communications Centre (FSCC) technology requirements

In principle, most respondents supported using technology to enhance observation capability. In practice, concerns were raised about whether current technology is adequate. Many respondents emphasised runway

and approach surveillance systems must genuinely enhance rather than replace direct observation, high-definition standards must be mandated, technology should be additional/redundant to elevated observation rooms, and systems must be proven effective before wider rollout. One association representing a large number of operators suggested camera equipment be of the same standard required in ATC digital tower technology.

Proposal 18 - Fire alarms termination requirements

This proposal generated concerns about response times, coordination, and potential service gaps. ARFFS responds to alarms (including building alarms), dispatches crews, and contacts tenants immediately, leveraging familiarity with buildings and airport topography. Multiple respondents argued that removing alarm monitoring from ARFFS creates additional organisational layers, potentially delaying response where quick intervention prevents escalation. State fire authorities noted that, if functions must be supplemented by State/Territory services, additional funding or Memorandum of Agreement arrangements may be needed. Some suggested non-alarm fault codes could go to third parties, but actual alarm activations should remain with ARFFS for immediate crew response.

Proposal 19 - Minimum operational staffing requirements

Multiple submissions emphasised that Task Resource Analysis (TRA) must use ICAO methodology and must be conducted transparently with stakeholder involvement. References were made to the 2019 Senate Inquiry, Recommendation 5, requiring CASA to mandate that TRA processes involve direct engagement of ARFFS staff at all stages. Concerns were raised about previous TRA being conducted without transparency, using non-ICAO methodology, incorporating risk mitigations to reduce numbers, and refusing to share working calculations. Multiple submissions noted that proper TRA would show significantly higher staffing requirements than currently provided. Specific examples were cited of staffing declining over time while aircraft operations increased, with no safety case justifying reductions. Concerns were raised that TRA should be conducted at actual required category, not remission-reduced category. Multiple submissions emphasised that proper TRA should include separate analysis of Domestic Response Service requirements at major airports to ensure aviation category is maintained when responding to non-aviation incidents.

Proposal 20 - Ancillary equipment requirements

This proposal generated concerns based on past experience with equipment standard degradation. Multiple submissions referenced Senate Committee findings about dispensations from CASA to not comply with standards. An example cited was power saws. The key concern was that allowing ARFFS providers to self-determine equipment requirements would lead to cost-cutting at the expense of capability. Some respondents supported outcome-focused approaches but emphasised the need for strict reference to ICAO standards, CASA oversight of provider proposals, consultation with stakeholders, TRA methodology to determine equipment needs, and public transparency.

Proposal 21 - Officer in Charge (OIC) qualification requirements

Multiple submissions argued that an Advanced Diploma qualification provides competencies essential for managing Level 3 incidents: developing strategic plans, policy review capabilities, stakeholder engagement, and senior management responsibilities beyond operational firefighting. Concerns were raised about requiring the OIC to be part of the operational crew rather than additional, arguing this takes away needed firefighters from understaffed operations, and that the OIC needs to coordinate with multiple agencies and maintain year-round relationships. Some respondents supported an outcome-focused approach, while one industry association suggested that a lower qualification level is widely adopted outside the ARFF sector. Concerns were raised that reducing OIC capability could compromise incident management effectiveness, particularly at complex Level 3 incidents requiring coordination.

Proposal 22 - ARFFS training requirements

Multiple submissions expressed concerns about adequate training, unsuitable equipment provision, and reduced training opportunities. One submission noted evidence of inadequate training programs from third-party providers, introducing concerns about non-standardised systems reliant on provider discretion, particularly when providers may be motivated to reduce costs. Several submissions questioned what contemporary training requirements means, noting the term is vague. A key argument emphasised that formal, centralised training curricula develop necessary skills for safe performance. The concern was that ad hoc systems at ARFFS provider discretion would create inconsistent standards, with shortcomings only exposed during incidents. Some supported contemporary competency-based training but emphasised the need for measurable outcomes, standardised minimum requirements, regular frequent training, on-site training facilities for currency, and oversight to ensure ARFFS providers don't reduce standards.

Proposal 23 - Foam testing requirements

This proposal generated broad support in principle, with technical submissions emphasising importance of high-temperature testing for Australian conditions. Multiple submissions suggested CASA implement a testing program for foams under conditions unique to Australia including higher ambient temperatures. Submissions noted that environmental policy will likely prohibit PFAS-containing foams, requiring transition to less environmentally concerning products. However, PFAS-free foams have lower performance and require greater volume, potentially necessitating increased vehicle capacity.

Proposal 24 - Training foam use

Multiple submissions from experienced firefighters described fundamental differences between training foam and operational foam. One described how real foam creates white-out conditions on windscreens with equipment getting lost under foam cover, while another characterised training foam as providing no understanding of firefighting foam properties. Reference was made to a current exemption allowing training foam at one facility, with multiple submissions claiming oversight is inadequate. Some suggested limiting training foam to early-stage training, with at least 50% of foam-based training using operational foam to ensure firefighters understand actual foam properties. Recognition that reducing PFAS environmental contamination is important, but not at the expense of inadequate training for life-safety operations.

3.3 Alternative approaches and implementation considerations

Several constructive alternative approaches were proposed including: requiring airports to self-report when trends indicate approaching thresholds; mandating ICAO TRA methodology with stakeholder involvement; maintaining centralised formal training curricula with minimum standards; requiring demonstration of technology capability before approval; mandating high-temperature foam testing for Australian conditions; and if contestability allowed, requiring stringent standards for alternative ARFFS providers.

Implementation considerations emphasised the need for clear transitional provisions, comprehensive advisory circulars, realistic timeframes, transparent cost impact assessment, and ongoing consultation during regulation development. Several respondents noted limitations of the online survey format for complex technical issues, suggesting future consultations might benefit from formats allowing more detailed responses.

4 Next steps

The feedback to the consultation was valuable and will be considered by CASA in the future development of specific regulations in relation to the provision of aerodrome rescue and fire fighting services.

Further development of Part 176 of CASR and its MOS is dependent on a number of factors including Government legislative drafting priorities and availability of resources, within CASA and externally. When the opportunity arises, Part 176 of CASR will be legally drafted by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the MOS, by CASA's legal division. These legislative instruments will be subject to further public consultation and additionally may have prior consultation with an industry working group such as a Technical Working Group under the Aviation Safety Advisory Panel.

There will be another opportunity for industry to review and provide further comment on the full details of any specific regulatory changes related to ARFFS scope and responsibilities under the CASR.

A detailed timeframe for consultation of the new Part 176 of CASR and its MOS will be made available in due course.