

GFA President report AGM 2020

Given the year it's been I thought I might use some subjects from last year, and then add some aspects from the 'year that wasn't'.

There were many good and exciting things happening when this financial year started, there were also been some that are not as good, but by and large we were moving forward in a positive and progressive manner, Until the fires, smoke and virus hit and some things were taken out of our control.

CASA, funding changes and general.

Our reporting requirements had changed and been expanded with last year's allocation, so less money and more reporting, CASA says that is because this is public money and we should always have been giving this information. The current agreement lasts 2 years, and we are now in the second year, I recently signed the Deed of Agreement and sent them the two paper copies they require, really paper in this day and age. But I digress, moving on, I am concerned that this funding will cease or be lowered further in the future, causing a need for us to decide which aspects we will continue with, as a large portion of our costs are specifically about CASA and its requirements. We also have to apply and pay for some of those authorities that actually assist CASA as much as our members. "Is it worth the cost and effort?" is a question I can see being asked a lot in the future.

Recently I have been included in some correspondence about heavy handed dealings that CASA is taking with some other groups outside of the sports aviation sector, I have advised the Board so they may be on top of it. We need to be careful of supposedly well justified Bureaucracy both in CASA and indeed within our own organization. It is very easy to add rules, regulations etc, but very hard to remove them.

In SA they have just brought in 'COVID Marshalls' and it effects my gliding club, so the club has taken a reasonable approach (I think) and asked all instructors to do the test (yes there is an online test) so that we will always be 'compliant'. One instructor that I know and absolutely respect has said he is not going to do that and has taken himself off the instructor's roster. I totally understand, its just another barrier, and with every barrier, we lose more good and capable people, regardless of who sets up that barrier: the Government, GFA, the regions, or our clubs. A barrier to participation is just that, a barrier.

Part 149

I sent an email to CASA recently asking for an extension of the fee free time to enter part 149, this request was based on the recent history, the time and difficulty seen by the one group that has entered the 149 system, and, of course the COVID 19 aspects. Your Board is being appraised on this significant matter regularly, and will decide as we progress towards a decision. Current thinking is that we will probably go into Part 149, but nothing is certain. I was promised a reply to my email question very quickly, but it has not arrived at the time of writing this.

If the Board decides to take on Part 149 it will be the most significant change in our operating methodology since the OpRegs were introduced. It will have significant and long-term effects, we need to be alert to unintended consequences that because of what I call the 'CASA effect', can not be changed because they are enshrined in some form of legislation, including CASA internal 'how to' documents. The Board has tasked 3 members to continue to review and make recommendations on this matter.

Financial changes

There are risks to this current approach of investing and actively managing our finances. There will be wins and losses, ups and downs, but the aim is to grow our interest by greater than 4% above inflation. This does not stop us from going back to fixed bank fixed deposits if they increase their returns, but that is not going to happen soon, fixed deposits are extremely low at the moment. Please read the financial statement in the AGM documents

Marketing and promotion

This group has started some great work. We have some new Logo's, more appropriate slogans based around the word 'Extraordinary'. A new website is about to be unveiled, I hope you like it, the website has been an area that has been discussed many times over the last few years. It's a difficult ask, every time we change anything it creates the worry that some people drop out of our sport simply because of the change, or sometimes because of the pace of the change around them. But we need to change to ensure we remain relevant in this brave new world.

Safety group

You are probably aware that the Soar reporting now has an independent volunteer group conducting initial non biased assessment of Soar reports. This has proved to be very good and efficient. Safety isn't about big targets and ideas, it's about all of us making the right and safe decisions before and when we fly, maintain, or assist in the pursuit of our sport. Don't forget, it's a sport.

Membership

At May 2020 we had 2488 members down 1% since 2015. A membership deep dive has been conducted with the aim to identify clubs that have lost membership. On the basis of if you don't know, you can't fix it, this deep dive is based around clubs and has been made available to club committees. I don't know what the result of the virus restrictions will be but there are some good signs that there are more people joining as some parts of our country come out of the various and changing lockdowns.

Loans to clubs

The GFA makes loans to clubs seem to be being used more often, this is a really good thing, it assists clubs in major purchases, such as aircraft at a cheaper rate than the banks. A Win-Win situation, and one that is a great support for our members and their clubs.

Communication with members

Launch point is the new communication to members, the name was chosen by asking you, the members for ideas, we still do the Magazine, the GFA Forum, Presidents Forum, as well as our Facebook page and individual emails when needed. Go Membership is slowly evolving and being used more fully and I sincerely hope members are becoming used to it and hopefully the saying in the next few years will be 'why didn't we do this before'. If you are on the forums please try to remain respectful and reasonable, remember the people you are talking to, about and of, are mostly volunteers.

Social Media

There are some good and some bad things about social media, some of the recent past has been full of hateful and targeted criticisms of the GFA leadership and governance, sometimes personal, vindictive, and often wrong. On the other hand, there has been some terrific mutually concerned and supportive aspects of the same social media. The Board was concerned, but rather than shut down our internal social media, some simple and responsible actions were taken in an attempt to take the vitriol away and make the actions of the small amount of members who did the wrong thing not stop the genuine members from talking and having a good time corresponding and questioning. It seems to be working.

Updated Member Protection Policy

We have continually been updating this to make it reasonable and useful, unfortunately, it is still cumbersome and sometimes almost unworkable without good faith on both sides. There are, at the time of writing three appeals current within this process, taking a large amount of time from volunteer members who, I believe, could be better focused helping the GFA generally.

Less face to Face meetings

Last year I said we were having less Face to face meeting as part of a plan to minimize unnecessary costs. Because of the COVID 19 situation this has obviously accelerated, hence all current meetings are electronic. There is a place for face to face meeting, however, it will come as no surprise to members that face to face won't happen in the short term due to factors outside of our control.

Online tests

Currently Radio Procedures, Airways and Airspace, and the A, B and C certificates and the flight reviews for both Command pilots and Instructors are also conducted on line, expect more as we move to be more effective in this space.

Airworthiness video's

The Airworthiness Department and their Training Manager have been working diligently getting documentation better, and supplementing with training videos. This is great work and we all benefit from this.

Simulators

Last year I mentioned the GFA simulator. Because of the virus many members have been playing with Condor and such. Simulators can be good, they stimulate the mind but without proper instruction they can lead to unhelpful habits and actions. Be careful when you come back to real flying.

Minimise or remove barriers to participation for our members.

We have some significant challenges ahead of us, but we also have strategies in place to overcome most of these. We must not return to the days of internal disruption for political purposes. We can only survive if we work together, unfortunately we sometimes forget that.

Although we worry about CASA and increased rules and regulations, we also need to be very careful that we don't turn into worse than CASA. A member I trust and listen to said to me yesterday, "RAAus isn't stealing our members, we are driving them away". That worried me. As a general rule at Board level the

GFA is attempting to minimize and reduce barriers to activity, sometimes these continue to be put in place despite our best efforts, and with Part 149 somewhere close, we need to be very careful of anything new being proposed that puts up barriers to participation. Please let's all work with this aim and remain the organisation we need to be, one that is vibrant, exciting and dynamic. So please minimise or remove barriers to participation for our members.

Bushfires and COVID-19

This season has been hopefully a worst case, with Bushfires and the resulting smoke haze minimizing flying, competitions and activity generally, followed directly by the Covid 19 virus and the restrictions. Talk about barriers to participation, I am concerned about two things related to these items, firstly I am concerned that we will lose members who have become used to not going to their gliding club, and secondly the effect on some of those members. The first needs for clubs to be vibrant in enticing members back, when they can.

Regarding the second, readers may remember last year I mentioned that sadly we were slowly seeing the demise of a large and significant group of people through the impost of advancing years, I fear this will accelerate given the current situation. A phone call to check on your mates is a worthwhile thing to do, as some of our members may well feel isolated and fearful.

Please also remember these members have been very effective in keeping our organization vibrant and alive over a very long period of time and we cannot hope to replicate some of their fine work, we should also ensure that their efforts are not lost as we move to the future.

Volunteer positions

Each year effectively all positions in GFA come up for election, some in Regions, some at the GFA AGM, we also have a limit of 5 years for most positions.

I will not be putting my name up for President this year, why? simply because I have some other things I feel I want to do, and now is my time of life to do them. We should all have that choice; however, I will commit to continuing to support The GFA as much as I can in the future.

Thank you to all who have given their time and efforts to make this a better organisation, keep doing what you can and don't let social media drive you into poorly considered directions.

Peter Cesco

President

August 2020