

MAAA PRESIDENTS REPORT TO THE 2021 ANNUAL COUNCIL CONFERENCE

HEADLINE: President's Report – Final words from Neil Tank

COPY: This will be my last report as President of the MAAA. After almost nine years at the helm, I have decided to retire and hand the reins to a younger team. We need younger members at the top to allow us old "fellas" to enjoy our pastime.

Aeromodelling is a great sport and hobby and I have enjoyed helping lay the foundations to ensure model aviation is available to young and old for many years to come. It is my belief that one should retire whilst in front and with some petrol left in the tank.

How MAAA Has Evolved

When I first became President, challenges were evident and the MAAA was at a crossroads. Many believed the MAAA existed only to provide insurance, had too much money, was nontransparent and looked after the interests of some privileged few.

So strong were the views of some, a breakaway alternative organisation was formed. These perceptions were ill-conceived, but challenges the organisation had to face and address. It also highlighted that communication with members needed to drastically improve.

The starting point was to determine what the MAAA was all about, its vision for the future, objectives, strengths, and weaknesses. Accordingly, a ten-year strategic plan was developed and implemented.

The major thrust of this plan was to provide a service to members, promote model aviation and build the organisation. The strategic plan received the backing of the MAAA Council, and much of what was agreed has been achieved.

The first priority was to improve communication between the MAAA and members. Although the MAAA has been in existence for many years, feedback from members indicated little was known about the organisation's purpose, management structure and relationship to affiliate members.

To this end, a marketing firm was engaged to assist. Regular newsletters from the President were produced and a quarterly digital magazine "Wingspan" was launched. Financial activities became more transparent through the publication of audited financial accounts and Facebook was also embraced.

Marketing conducted regular surveys to ascertain views of members on many topics, which gave us valuable information and insight.

To improve Club facilities, and return money to model aviation, the Club Assistance Scheme was developed. This allows Clubs to utilise MAAA funds to improve facilities, make them more attractive to potential members and refine communications.

Recognising many MAAA Clubs were in danger of being swallowed by the suburban spawl, we continued to pursue purchasing land and leasing it back to the State organisations for the purpose of establishing model aviation facilities.

Land other than that leased by the club is leased to sharefarmers, and currently land has been purchased in Victoria and South Australia.

The MAAA must be administered as a business and as such, there was a need to change some administrative practices. The secretary's position has been changed from an elected position to a fully paid employee, reporting to the MAAA Executive. Accounting functions were improved with the purchase of a modern online accounting system. A bookkeeper was contracted to manage the day-to-day accounting practices, and an online member registration database was investigated and commissioned. This provided facilities for membership renewals to be updated by club registrars. Some teething issues were experienced but with help from members, these have been overcome. The constitution has been changed to allow for an Executive Council consisting of Presidents from all Ordinary Members. The Executive Council has the same powers as the full MAAA Council. This change is part of a plan to reduce Council costs and return savings to members.

The contributions members make to promote model aviation activities has not gone unrecognised. The MAAA Services Award was introduced and is awarded to members who assist in club and state activities. Without these unsung heroes, many activities would not take place. Congratulations to members who have deservedly received this award.

CASA Regulations

The MAAA is highly regarded by CASA as a responsible and safety-conscious organisation, complimented by management structures, which ensure model aviation activities are safe for all.

This reputation is mainly due to the positive safety culture of all members. If it was not for this responsible approach adopted by clubs and affiliate members, model aviation activities would be very restrictive.

The MAAA Executive has fostered a professional relationship with CASA officials and has been able to negotiate privileges not available to similar organisations; for example, exemptions for MAAA members relating to the compulsory remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) registration and licensing system, night flying, height exemptions and FPV flying. The introduction of multi rotors and drone technology threatened to bring about greater legislative restrictions for all aeromodellers.

A Senate Enquiry for remotely piloted aircraft was established, the focus being on regulation, by the proposed registration and licensing of model aircraft and pilots. Although no one could point to any specific incident in which a model aircraft had caused a hazard to aviation safety, most Senators lumped model aircraft into the same bundle as multi-rotors.

To address these issues, a submission was prepared and presented to the Senate Select Committee by then secretary, Mr. Kevin Dodd, on behalf of the MAAA.

This submission was well received and work commenced on developing a stronger professional relationship with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). I am pleased to say the exemptions gained far surpass those of other countries.

Training

To satisfy the community that MAAA members were responsible pilots, the MAAA saw a need to improve training practices.

We needed to put procedures in place to teach new members safe flying and knowledge of legislative requirements.

The knowledge of current instructors also needed to be updated. The philosophy being that if the instructor did not know legislative and safety requirements, how could this be passed on to those under instruction?

The MAAA Council approved a plan to re-qualify current instructors. The plan was never to re-test the flying ability of the Instructor, but to bring them up to date with current regulations, safety practices and training techniques.

Disputes

Member to member disputes proved to be an incredibly challenging and confronting side of model aviation administration.

All member disputes have the potential to split and at times destroy a Club. We all joined aeromodelling to have fun, so we should not let differences of opinion get in the way of the enjoyment of our hobby.

In severe cases, Club committees need to be strong, take affirmative action, not take sides, and make decisions in the interest of the entire membership.

Events

A number of major events have been promoted and supported by the MAAA, including Victorian Nationals in Albury/Wodonga, Sandown Large Scale Racing in Victoria, the Control Line World Cup in Western Australia and Large Model Flying events at Luskentyre and Casino.

These events provide an opportunity for the public to see the best in model aviation, wets prospective members' appetites and provides an avenue for Clubs to promote their activities.

Safety

Safety is an issue the MAAA continues to hold as a top priority. The MAAA's safety record is the major contributor to successful negotiations with CASA and other Federal Authorities. In my travels to Clubs, I have been impressed with the safety culture displayed by members, from the way the flying fields have been designed to the adherence to rules by members.

Complacency has been the major factor for accidents and mainly involved members who have been flying for many years. Safety should be the main thought in everyone's mind and it's important to remember it only take one slip of concentration to ruin your aeromodelling activities.

Market research indicates much progress has been made in respect to member satisfaction, however, there is much more to be done. The new Executive team will face many challenges including complacency, smaller management, changing RPAs regulations, aging membership and the future structure of the organisation.

Final Thoughts

In closing, I thank all members for their support during my period as President. All that has been achieved has come about by the cooperation and support of the MAAA Executive, MAAA Council and affiliate members.

Fortunately, I have been provided with the opportunity to visit many Clubs on a national basis, and have been impressed by the enthusiasm and friendliness of all.

I thank the staff attached to the CASA RPA Section for their professional approach to model aviation activities, helping MAAA Executive and CASA to maintain a cordial and professional relationship, resulting in outcomes beneficial to both organisations.

Finally, I would like to thank all members who have served on the MAAA Council and Executive for their support and guidance. A special thanks to Mr. Kevin Dodd the former MAAA Secretary for his guidance early in my Presidency.

The future of model aviation in Australia does not only rest with the MAAA Executive and Council, it rests with all of us. Well intentioned plans can be put in place, however if the club membership does not embrace them, they will not be achieved.

I wish all members glad tidings for the future and ask all to remember why they took up this sport, to satisfy their interest of aviation, to enjoy the camaraderie and most of all have fun.

J. Neil Tank
President MAAA