

## NOTAMs

As pilots, we all know how good it is to be appreciated – to be complimented on a good landing or handling a drama well, or even a nice smooth flight (which, of course, you always tell your passengers is nothing to do with the weather and all down to your superb skills as a pilot.) One such bit of appreciation was on the ground at Narrogin recently when one of the glider pilots commented to my student (Matt) that I was a good instructor. The reason for his appreciation? We knew that winch operations were a possibility at Narrogin. How did we know that? We'd done something that the glider pilot suggested wasn't very common. We'd read our NOTAMs.

### Why are they issued?

Broadly speaking, NOTAMs (Notices to Airmen) are issued for two reasons:

- Changes to operational information that are expected to be temporary and of short duration;
- Permanent changes, or temporary changes of long duration, made at short notice.

An example of the first would be a NOTAM advising of a military exercise. An example of the second might be a change to take-off distance available on a runway, that will be included in the next update of ERSA but which pilots using the runway should be aware of immediately.

### Types of NOTAMs

Most NOTAMs are aerodrome-specific. Others – FIR NOTAMs – typically apply to an area rather than an aerodrome. Head Office NOTAMs apply Australia-wide rather than just to a specific area.

### Aerodrome-specific NOTAMs

Certified and military aerodromes have a full NOTAM service. They're the ones that have CERT or MIL under the aerodrome abbreviation in ERSA. ERSA entries for uncertified aerodromes such as Northam have UNCR, are shaded in grey, and generally have a notice saying, "FULL NOTAM SERVICE NOT AVBL." Usually that means the aerodrome operator can't create NOTAMs to advise, for instance, that there are works on the taxiway or the lights are U/S. So the only NOTAMs you'll see for somewhere like Northam are for activities such as fireworks or, say, a women's ballooning championship event, where the person doing the fireworks or organising the balloons will notify CASA, who then issue a NOTAM. If the PAL frequency changes because CASA decides it should be a different frequency from the CTAF, they'd also advise that in a NOTAM.

So because you can't rely on NOTAMs to tell you all you need to know about temporary changes, such as works on the taxiway or U/S lights, it's always good airmanship to ring the aerodrome operator before you fly to an uncertified aerodrome, the same way you would if you were flying to an aerodrome that only appears in the Country Airstrip Guide and not ERSA.

### Reasons for aerodrome NOTAMs

Changes in runway details are a common reason for issuing NOTAMs. An example is right on the boundary of Area 60. The NOTAM for Cue, valid at the time of writing, says the runway is now fully sealed. Interestingly, the validity period states, "FROM 06 270359 TO PERM", so according to the NOTAM, from midday on June 27<sup>th</sup> the runway was fully sealed, but according to the entry for Cue in the latest ERSA (September 7<sup>th</sup> edition), it's still unsealed apart from the ends. Other reasons for issuing aerodrome NOTAMs include:

- Obstacles – new, changes to published height, changes to lighting;
- Bird or animal hazards;
- Changes to navigation aids;

- Drone operations or fireworks;
- For a military aerodrome like Pearce, activation of their restricted airspace.

### FIR NOTAMs

These are the ones at the bottom of the NOTAM list, that apply to areas and not aerodromes. Reasons for an FIR NOTAM include (but are certainly not limited to):

- Changes to PRD areas, or activation of restricted areas, that don't apply to a specific aerodrome like Pearce;
- Changes to chart information;
- Fireworks at the Royal Show;
- UA or glider operations that apply to a wide area rather than an aerodrome. For example, if a gliding competition from Cunderdin involved gliders flying as far east as Southern Cross and as far south as Lake Grace, that would be advised in an FIR NOTAM, not a NOTAM for Cunderdin.

Some restricted areas are active at set times, including H24, but many are activated by NOTAM. On the Perth VNC you can see the boundaries and levels for all the military restricted areas. And in the top right-hand corner is a table that tells you most of them are activated by NOTAM. So if you're planning to fly up to Jurien or Dongara and you'd like to take a shortcut through the red areas, you need to either read your NOTAMS or find the activation times in a Restricted Area briefing in NAIPS.

### Getting them

An area briefing or a location briefing in NAIPS will include the relevant NOTAMs. When you go to the page to select your area or location, you'll see it has Met and NOTAM ticked, so the default setting is for NAIPS to give you everything it has for the relevant area or location.

If you select "NOTAM" or "Head Office NOTAM" in NAIPS you generally get the same result – all NOTAMS applicable to your area.

### Reading them

They're full of abbreviations, most of which are pretty easy for a pilot to work out. The times are generally in 8-figure or 10-figure (year-month-day-hour-minute) format and, of course, they're in UTC. For instance, the one that Matt and I were so careful to read before our flight said:

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WINCH OPERATIONS WILL TAKE PLACE
AMD EN ROUTE SUPP AUSTRALIA (ERSA) AND AIP CHARTS
SFC TO 3500FT AMSL
FROM 05 170708 TO PERM
JF
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Narrogin has had gliding operations for years, but it's always been aero-tows. Now they have a winch as well, they needed an amendment to the information because it's one thing to avoid an aeroplane towing a glider, and it's another thing altogether to be looking out for 3000 ft of steel cable. As the second line says, the information in ERSA and on charts will be amended, which it has been – the ERSA entry now refers to winch launching and the VNC now has a "W" next to the standard "++" gliding symbol.

The times on this one are from May 17<sup>th</sup> at 1508, permanently, and since it's also now in ERSA, the NOTAM will eventually be cancelled. The other time information is "JF", which looks like one of those

good uses of French in abbreviations: J for jour – daytime – and F for fin de semaine – weekends. (I am of course happy for my French to be corrected by M. Meunier!)

A pretty simple one for Morawa is on a common theme for this time of year:  
INCREASED WILDLIFE HAZARD (KANGAROOS) IN VCY OF AD DUE FENCE REPLACEMENT  
FROM 09 250000 TO 10 090000 EST

Unlike many animal or bird hazard NOTAMs, which give you a finish time and leave you wondering how the wildlife knows they are required to vacate the airfield by that time, this one is based on known dates for the fence replacement. But it's a good example of a temporary hazard, which is what so many NOTAMs are about.

Here's a good example of an FIR NOTAM that you ought to read if you're flying out of Northam or surrounds at the relevant times.

LOW LEVEL GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY ACFT  
OPR WI 43NM RADIUS OF GOOMALLING AD (YGOM)  
AREA COVERING: BRG 315 MAG 47NM, BRG 194 MAG 39NM, BRG 162 MAG  
41NM, BRG 002 MAG 17NM FM GOOMALLING AD  
ACFT TYPE: C210 CALLSIGN: VH-HHJ  
OPR CTC TEL: 0400 750 929  
ACFT WILL MNT 126.7 AND 124.2  
100FT AGL TO 1500FT AGL  
FROM 09 252200 TO 10 261100 EST  
HJ

If you can be bothered plotting all the points listed, you're keener than me. I'd just look at "BRG 194 MAG 39NM" and think, "Well, that puts Northam within the range of the survey operations, so I'll call the phone number listed." Chances are the person who answers will speak plain English and say something like, "We'll be east of Goomalling, north of the highway, between 8 and 12 today." The NOTAM tells you his callsign and the frequencies he'll be monitoring, so you'll keep your eyes and ears open. The NOTAM tells you his operating heights (probably much closer to 100 ft than 1500 ft AGL if it's a survey), the times (September 26<sup>th</sup> at 0600 local to October 26<sup>th</sup> at 1900 local), and HJ – daylight hours, which is clearly a good plan if you're getting around at 100 ft AGL.

When you look at your Met briefing, you look at the relevant aerodrome, ignore the ones that don't concern you, and read the Graphical Area Forecast to see which bits of it apply to you. Same goes for NOTAMs. Read the ones for the relevant airfields, ignore the other airfields, and read all the FIR NOTAMs because it's often not immediately obvious which ones pertain to your flight. It all adds up to more of an old but good cliché – situational awareness.

Kevin