

# Storm over weather

I AGREE whole heartedly with John Thirwall of Northbridge NSW in his letter headed "Complicated weather codes" (FSA Nov-Dec, p. 8).

I have been flying since 1965 and I too have wondered why the Met reports have to be so hard to decipher.

In this day and age with our technology, Met reports should be made simpler to read and not more difficult, as they seem to be getting.

No doubt the meteorologists have no trouble reading them as this is their bread and butter.

I too believe that this could be a safety issue especially for newer pilots ... and older pilots like me.

– Gary Chapman  
via email

THE LETTER in the November/December 2006 issue about plain English translations of

weather codes was sensible.

We all know the codes are succinct – that's the problem!

Your specialist argues that there would be risks of misinterpretation, and yet by definition every code has a standard interpretation.

There would be far less risk for a computer system to turn five characters into a standard phrase than for a human pilot to do the same, especially if they don't do this every day.

As for requiring global computer changes, that misses the point. Obviously, the codes work fine for computers and expert meteorologists, so there is no need to change the back office.

It's at the pilot interface where a bit of plain English is required, so this could be done at a local level without compromising international standards.

– Jim Hart  
Fitzroy, Vic



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AS WE are no longer constrained by the Morse code era and use computers for even the most mundane tasks, it would be a simple matter to issue a plain English forecast as well as the ICAO-compliant coded forecast.

On two consecutive years at the Sport Aircraft Association's "Wings Over Wagga" convention, participants in aviation weather forums left the BOM presenter in no doubt about the serious safety consequences of inaccessible weather forecasts.

As SAAA president at the time, I conveyed this concern to the chiefs of the BOM, CASA and Airservices. In part, my letter said:

"[The] forums generated vigorous discussion on the topic of coded weather reports. It became very clear as the discussion progressed that private and recreational pilots find using coded forecasts and reports very difficult indeed to use.

"In fact, it is very clear that

because the reports are so inaccessible, pilots are flying without a sufficient understanding of the weather conditions.

"Coded reports are suited to ICAO-compliant transport operations and the ATPL holders who conduct them. These pilots fly every day and may have no problem decoding weather reports. Private and recreational pilots do not fly every day, and hence are not adept at decoding weather reports. They obviously take their chances rather than spend a disproportionate amount of time decoding.

"I want to alert you to what is quite evidently a serious safety issue. After fuel management errors, flying into unsuitable weather is the greatest cause of private aviation fatalities. It is essential that agencies such as the Bureau and Air Services implement a plain English form of forecasts and reports for private and recreational pilots."

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**CHANGES TO VISUAL ACUITY TEST REQUIREMENT**

All NDT Authority holders are now required to have visual acuity tests conducted every 12 months, instead of the previous requirement of every two years. This is in compliance with AS3669, the Australian Aerospace NDT personnel qualification standard.

Of course, there was no action. When fatalities occur, ATSB may be able to determine that a forecast was issued, but they have no idea if it was understood. Lack of understanding of forecasts therefore never appears as a cause of an accident. The private and recreational pilots of Australia have identified the hazard and cried for help. Is nobody listening?

– Peter Bennett  
Secretary, Leisure Flight Australia  
Beacon Hill, NSW

The Bureau of Meteorology is bound by the ICAO regulations governing weather codes and the format of forecasts and warnings.

However, we are trialling several schemes designed to supplement our services. They include graphical representation of Area QNH,

plain English weather briefings for major international airports, and maps of thunderstorm tracks and forecasts.

We are also planning infrastructure for the production of graphical area forecasts.

Additionally, we are represented on an international panel considering new terminal aerodrome forecasts, which will provide more information to pilots, air traffic controllers and airlines. And we participate in CASA Safety Promotion continuing education programs.

Meanwhile, you can access pilot aids on decoding terminal area forecasts, from the bureau and Airservices Australia publications and web sites.

– Sue Lawrence, National Manager Aviation Weather Services, Bureau of Meteorology

Flight Safety Australia will run a feature on weather codes and forecasts in an upcoming issue.

**Errata Nov–Dec issue**

In the story “Proposal for multi-crew pilot licence”, Safety Rules, page 64, the last paragraph should read:

The proposal includes a requirement for a minimum of 40 hours flying training in aircraft out of 240 hours total flying training time.

The “Pick the Pic” answer on page 59 was wrong – the aircraft is the Extra 300S.

**Write to FSA**

Ideal length for publication is 200 words; longer letters may be edited. Specify if your letter is not for publication, or if you wish to have your name withheld. Include your phone number (not for publication). Email [fsa@casa.gov.au](mailto:fsa@casa.gov.au)

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