



Avalon Airshow – bigger than ever

Justin Giddings and the team at AMDA have been busy since the record-breaking 2023 Avalon Airshow, attended by 250,000 visitors. In the lead up to the 2025 airshow, to be held from 25–28 March (trade visitors) and Friday pm 28 March to 30 March (public), *RAAA News* talked to the AMDA CEO about the exciting things planned for this year.

‘We’ve added a new fourth expo hall and reconfigured how the halls are positioned,’ Giddings said. ‘The expo halls have been expanded, so the exhibition space will be much larger, in fact it will be the biggest in the airshow’s history.’

Giddings is also expecting a large turnout of aircraft. ‘The Australian Defence Force will have a big presence, as will the United States Air Force, and military from other nations,’ he said, not to mention a wide range of civilian aircraft, flying and static.

Avalon will feature a spectacular public airshow, with air displays from advanced jet fighters such as the Royal Australian Air Force F-35 Lightning and US Air Force F-22 Raptor strike aircraft, heavy-lift giants including the RAAF C-17 Globemaster and C-130 Hercules, and precision aerobatics from the Royal Australian Air Force’s Roulettes team flying its Pilatus PC-21s.

There will be visiting international military aircraft, vintage and veteran, warbirds and modern military machinery. They will share the air with Australia’s own Paul Bennett Airshows and Matt Hall Racing civil aerobatics teams, flying some of the most specialised, high-performance aerobatics aircraft available today, including the Wolf Pitts Pro, Extra 300L and Australian made MXS-R.

Continued page 4

In this issue

Avalon Airshow – bigger than ever

New halls, more exhibition space and a full conference program – Avalon 2025 is a must visit.

New SAF partnership

Air Link and Viva Energy partner in a GA first.

RAAA’s election policy

With the announcement of the date of the federal election imminent, *RAAA News* looks at the Association’s policy platform distributed to politicians.

New members

The RAAA’s membership continues to grow. *RAAA News* profiles our latest full member, Virgin Australia Regional Aviation.

From the chairman



Mal Sharp
RAAA Chairman
Sharp Aviation

A twelfth of the year gone already, and it looks like the frenetic pace of 2024 is set to continue, with the government's announcement about Rex, and a federal election imminent. The collapse of Rex typifies how fragile regional aviation is, when an airline of that substance can be lost overnight. What is needed now is a bipartisan and whole-of-industry solution to stem the shrinking of Australia's regional and remote communities.

I know regional airlines are starting to feel the pinch; in a vicious spiral, costs are increasing, and people are flying less. We know that regional airlines don't create the wealth, it's the people we carry – from cradle to coffin – regional aviation is simply the conduit between those remote communities and regional service centres, between isolated island communities and the mainland. How do we collaborate to make this vital industry more sustainable, to future-proof it? Let's use the impetus of an election year to bring government, industry and these regional communities together.



Photo | Associate member photo comp winner, OzRunways, Image: OzRunways/RAAA. Matt Hall will be flying at Avalon in March.

On that theme, we will be releasing an election policy document to be distributed to politicians and decision makers, MPs and senators across the parties, to raise awareness of issues affecting regional aviation. I encourage all members to pursue these discussions with their sitting member and party candidates so that politicians across the spectrum will be aware of the key issues facing regional aviation.

Against the backdrop of these more holistic challenges, we are working on meeting the challenges of the current industrial relations landscape. Our working group has had two meetings this year already, as we attempt to counter the efforts of the AFAP to challenge long-established understandings and to exploit loopholes in legislation. We are an active participant in negotiations and will be supporting operators when these actions will have a detrimental effect on the regional aviation industry.

Finally, in closing – the board will be attending the Avalon Airshow on Thursday 27 March, and we look forward to catching up with as many members as possible during that session on Thursday morning. Hope to see you there, and until then,

Fly safe

Mal

2025 Aviation events

RAAA events

25–28 March
Activities at Avalon

Roadshows

18–19 June
Sunshine Coast

17–18 September
Hobart

December Xmas function
Sydney

Other events

Avalon Airshow

25–28 March 2025
Avalon Airport, Victoria

<https://www.airshow.com.au/airshow2025/TRADE/about/index.asp>

2026 Aviation events

RAAA Convention

16–18 June
Cairns Convention Centre

From the CEO



Rob Walker
RAAA CEO

We're looking forward to our first 'event' for 2025, taking advantage of the Avalon Airshow. The RAAA is a keen supporter of the Airshow, which runs this year from Tuesday 25 March to Friday 28 March (the trade show), with the public days on Friday pm, Saturday and Sunday. Business manager, Natalie Gane, and I will be manning pod No. 19, which will be in exhibition hall 4, so if you're there, pop by and have a chat.

We are having our first board meeting for 2025 out at Essendon Airport on Wednesday 26 March then on Thursday the full board will be at the Airshow, from 10:00-11:30 in Conference Room 5 for our RAAA *Into the Future* session. I'll be talking about our 5-year strategy before passing over to RAAA members, AMSL Aero and Stralis to update us on their hydrogen-electric test flights. A networking session with the board will end the session. We hope to see as many of our members and suppliers there as possible to take advantage of this opportunity for networking and to raise awareness of the Association.



That will be more important than ever with the upcoming federal election, due to be held no later than 17 May. To promote awareness of regional aviation issues, we have developed an election policy document, which will be distributed to relevant MPs and senators, and more widely, to ensure politicians from all parties understand the impact their aviation policy decisions, or indecision for that matter, have on regional aviation.

We want to ensure the Association's stance on various pressing aviation issues, such as the workforce skills shortage, the ADS-B mandate, decarbonisation of aviation,

fleet replacement, emerging technology (AAM), is well understood. (See elsewhere in this issue of *RAAA News* for more detail on our election policy document.)

As set out as one of the Aviation White paper Initiatives, the Department of Infrastructure has drafted an '[Aviation Customer Rights Charter](#)', which, the Department says, 'will help to ensure that aviation customers are receiving appropriate treatment from airlines and airports in Australia. ... the Charter outlines expectations that the Aviation Industry Ombudsperson has in relation to the way providers respect and implement those rights. The Charter also draws attention to the need for airlines and airports to improve customer standards, make complaints processes accessible, ensure customer information is available and improve timely responses.'

In October last year, the Association made [a submission](#) on this issue, but if any RAAA members would like to make further comment, the draft Aviation Customer Rights charter is available on the Department's website for consultation until 28 February. Our response focused on the danger of imposing a 'one-size-fits-all' solution, creating unintended consequences for regional aviation. Our industry faces very different operating conditions to those of the major carriers, which are the focus of the charter. There must be a conversation around scalability, recognising that a cancellation for a regional operator who may be operating one flight daily to certain metropolitan destinations is a completely different scenario to one involving the major domestic carriers.

The December 2024 board meeting ratified some changes to the constitution, including the renaming of the Ordinary member category to Full member and some changes to the eligibility criteria. Honorary members have now become Life members and have voting rights. Life members can be nominated by any member (with the support of two board members) and nominations can be voted on at an ordinary board meeting.

Hoping to see you at Avalon, and until then,

Stay safe,

Rob

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Avalon Airshow ... cont.



To cater for visitors to what he said is now the 'fourth largest air show in the world', there are changes to the airshow viewing areas to ensure visitors have the closest vantage place to watch the displays. The corporate chalets have been moved: some closer to the expo halls, and others further north of the crowd line, so those on the crowd line will now have an uninterrupted view of the aerial action.

A changed traffic plan will mean fewer cars parked at the venue. There is no free parking onsite, and space is limited, so you will have to book it when you buy your ticket. However, to make the airshow more accessible, this year will see the introduction of a new ParkNRide option from Melbourne or Geelong, with shuttle buses delivering visitors directly to the site. Again, you will need to book this when you buy your Airshow ticket.



Photo | Aircraft display Avalon 2023. Image: supplied

'Ticket sales are going well,' Giddings said, with corporate hospitality sold out for the Saturday, and student registrations for the careers day on Friday full. The **Avalon careers program** is designed to inspire and educate students about the myriad career pathways in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). 'We will have 5000 secondary students attending on Friday, so it will be the biggest careers day we've ever done.'



STEM is a focus in the rapidly growing space industry, domestic and international, creating demand for thousands of science and technology-related jobs. The growth of the industry also means demand for jobs across the spectrum, from ground logistics to business management, marketing, sales and law. The growth in space exhibitors at the Airshow reflects this. 'In 2019, we had zero space exhibitors, last Airshow space represented 8 per cent of exhibitors, and in 2025 we're expecting that to grow even more,' Giddings said.

The **conference centre program is also full**, with organisations taking advantage of the industry drawcard to hold more than 40 conference sessions in conjunction with the Airshow. Avalon will be the venue for the **Southern Space Conference 2025** on Tuesday 25 March,

organised by the Space Industry Association of Australia (SIAA). The SIAA is also co-organiser of the International Astronautical Congress to be held in Sydney in September/October this year, expected to attract 10,000 national and international delegates.

The Australian Association of Uncrewed Systems (AAUS) will hold the second day of its conference: **SkyTech 2025: Exploring the Future of Uncrewed Flight**, at the Airshow conference centre on Tuesday 25 March.

On Wednesday 26 March, speakers from leading Australian and international airports such as Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, Western Sydney, Riyadh Airport and Saudi Arabia's new King Salman International Airport will present at the **2025 Next Generation World Airports Conference**. Presenters will discuss building airports which support sustainable aviation growth, with a particular focus on affordability, the integration of technology, and collaboration between airports and airlines.



Photo | Students at the Avalon Airshow 2023. Image: Image supplied

The Hub, also located in the conference centre, will be the centre of industry intel over Wednesday and Thursday, with a very tight program of presentations across a diverse range of topics: including innovation and collaboration, new aircraft types, decarbonisation and sustainable aviation fuels, the future workforce, training and

Avalon Airshow ... cont.

simulation. Kris Poria, CEO of Early Birds, will speak on 'Horizon Scanning for Aerospace: Staying Ahead of Emerging Technologies and Threats', focusing on how aerospace and defence organisations can proactively monitor technological advancements and industry trends.

Simulation and training will be a focus of two presentations: one where 'attendees will gain insight into how simulators have evolved to meet the demands of development, testing, and operational readiness, playing a pivotal role in enhancing aviation safety and pilot proficiency', and the other will examine the 'current trends in flight simulation technologies, the evolving training needs and expectations from aviation operators and the associated regulatory environment.

Darin Lovett, the executive director of the iLAUNCH Trailblazer program, will discuss how the program, funded by the Department of Education, is advancing Australia's sovereign space capabilities by uniting world-class researchers with industry leaders to commercialise groundbreaking space technologies.

Two presentations will offer insights into how aviation organisations, civil, military and government can collaborate to improve efficiency, capability and safety. Steven Williamson, Queensland Police/QGAir will explore how 'partnerships among Australasian operators can lead to greater operational efficiency, improve service resilience, and enable them to adapt more effectively to market changes'. Dr Katrina Sanders, chief medical officer with Aspen Medical, will

'explore how a unified military-civilian health response can leverage aerospace and defence capabilities to strengthen public health outcomes in emergencies'.

To be part of Avalon 2025, register for your trade visitor spot now:
<https://airshow.com.au/visitors/trade-visitor/registration/>

New SAF partnership

In a first for general aviation in Australia, two RAAA members have partnered in a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) trial. The partnership, between Viva Energy and Aviation Logistics operator, Air Link, will see the operator trial the fuel in its Air Link and AirMed charter and aeromedical jet fleet of Cessna Citation Mustangs.

The fuel is a blend of 91 per cent Jet A-1 and nine per cent synthetic blending component made from waste and residue feedstocks.



Photo | The Viva/Air Link partnership. Image: supplied

The SAF, imported from Europe, was manufactured using the hydrotreated esters and fatty acids (HEFA) pathway process. HEFA refines vegetable oils, waste oils, or fats into SAF through a process that uses hydrogen (hydrogenation) and can be blended to a maximum ratio of 50 per cent.

Mark Wardrop, CEO and chief

pilot at Air Link emphasised the operator's commitment to sustainability. 'Air Link and AirMed are committed to reducing emissions and playing our part in meeting the Commonwealth Government's net-zero targets. This trial is a great opportunity to demonstrate how we can make a real difference in aviation sustainability. 'I am not aware of any other general aviation business in Australia that has powered their aircraft using sustainable aviation fuel.'

Air transport represents approximately 2-3 per cent of global human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while in Australia, domestic aviation currently accounts for around 2 per cent of GHG emissions.

Rob Cavicchiolo is the carbon solutions manager at RAAA associate member, Viva Energy. 'Viva Energy is committed to playing an important role through the future supply of sustainable aviation fuel to assist in reducing carbon emissions from the aviation sector,' he said.

On average, SAF can reduce CO₂ emissions by 80 per cent compared to traditional jet fuel. This substantial reduction is crucial to the industry's progress towards decarbonisation.

According to aircraft manufacturer, Airbus, explaining its commitment to SAF: 'The key to SAF's impact lies in its life cycle. When burned, SAF still produces emissions similar to those emitted by fossil fuels. But unlike conventional jet fuels, which take fossil resources out of the ground and release previously stored carbon into the atmosphere, SAF primarily uses carbon that is part of the current carbon cycle in various

New SAF partnership ... cont.

feedstocks. This means that the CO₂ emitted during an aircraft's flight is re-absorbed by the biomass used in SAF production.'

RAAA election policy

Stop taking aviation for granted!

That's the call the RAAA is making to candidates in the lead-up to the federal election due before 17 May this year. The RAAA has released a timely policy document highlighting the vital role regional aviation plays in remote and regional communities and calling for action in six key areas.

The six key calls to action

1. Do more to address shortages of skilled aviation personnel
2. Remove unnecessary regulatory burdens and ensure government aviation agencies are resourced to provide efficient and cost-effective essential services
3. Provide economic support to regional and remote aviation businesses to foster greater investment in the sector
4. Speed up the widespread use of technology to improve safety
5. Provide additional support for regional and remote aviation businesses which adopt new technologies to reduce carbon emissions

6. Avoid one-size-fits-all government policies that place extra financial and administrative pressures on regional and remote operations.



It provides politicians and decision-makers with some compelling statistics. For example: the airlines and other air operators who are members of the Regional Aviation Association of Australia (RAAA) each year:

- Carry more than 2 million passengers
- Move more than 23 million kilograms of freight
- Directly employ more than 10,000 people. Moreover,
- 41 per cent of domestic passengers each year travel through regional airports, yet there are fewer regional airlines today than there were 20 years ago.
- 55 per cent of aviation workers are based in regional and remote areas.
- The fact that 'When the total fixed costs are added up, airport charges now account for roughly the same cost of the fuel for the flight.'

These fixed costs include large disparities between security and passenger landing fees for regional airports and metropolitan ones, with regional airports paying up to double the amount in landing fees, and up to 20 times the amount in security fees, when compared with their metropolitan counterparts.

The document highlights the fact that the aviation industry knows the challenges and risks ahead and is ready to tackle them – challenges such as renewing ageing fleets, decarbonising regional aviation, updating technology, while continuing to offer services across regional Australia. Keeping these small and medium sized businesses viable and profitable is hard work; margins are thin and return on capital hard-earned.

But the document states 'we need support to ensure success and, just like all other sectors in the economy, we are looking to government to provide the right policy settings. If they are to stay in the air these businesses need support, and they need it now. Support in the form of well-thought-out policies, targeted assistance where appropriate and relief from unnecessary bureaucratic burdens.'

To keep the planes flying we need:

- Government recognition that regional and remote aviation is a nationally significant industry essential to communities and major business sectors
- A financial support package providing long term certainty to regional and remote aviation businesses ready to invest in large ticket initiatives such as fleet renewal
- Decisions on the best type of support package, including direct financial investment, loan underwriting, loan guarantees, concessional finance or grants
- Examination of taxation incentives for operators to invest in aircraft fleet renewals.

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RAAA election policy ... cont.

The policy document will be distributed to all RAAA members before being made publicly available to key industry leaders and associations, members of parliament and senators and the aviation media.

We would also like you to share the policy with your local candidates to make sure regional aviation is on their radar.

Welcome to new members

Virgin Australia Regional Airlines



The Association is pleased to welcome new member, Virgin Australia Regional Airlines (VARA), based in Perth and servicing regional Western Australia, as well as flying interstate. RAAA News spoke to VARA's executive general manager, Nathan Miller, who is no stranger to the challenges and opportunities of regional aviation. 'Growing up, my father was chief pilot of East West Airlines, so you could say regional aviation is in my DNA. I love the unique challenges it brings,' Miller said. He joined VARA about two and a half years ago, bringing a diverse experience to the role, with over 30 years at airlines from Impulse to Ansett WA, Qantas, Jetstar, QantasLink and Network Aviation – initially in flying, moving to operational roles and now, general management.

Most of VARA's business is servicing fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) operations in Western Australia for large resources companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP.



Photo | Nathan Miller, executive general manager VARA Image: supplied

The remainder comprises intrastate and some interstate operations, for example to Hobart and Adelaide. 'For over 60 years, Skywest and now VARA, has been in the charter business, so we are highly adept at serving this market,' says Miller.

The Fokker 100 has been a FIFO workhorse for some time, but VARA has decided to replace their remaining F 100s with a new aircraft. 'Some might consider it a bold move to introduce a brand-new aircraft into this market, but we think it's the right move to make. Our customers and team are excited about it.'



Photo | One of VARA's current Fokker 100s Image: supplied

The aircraft in question is the Embraer 190-E2, a much more efficient and quieter evolution of the E-190. The narrow-body E-190-E2 fits the required 100-seat category, and its geared turbofan Pratt & Whiney engines, fly-by-wire controls and new avionics mean it is 30 per cent more fuel efficient than the Fokker 100 it will replace. 'We will take delivery of the first of our new E-190-E2's in August 2025, and with the few months required for all the regulatory approvals and changes to our AOC, all things going well we're hoping to have it in service around October,' Miller said.



Photo | Artist's impression of the new VARA E190-E2 Image: supplied

Miller said the timing is also right to join the RAAA. 'The voice of regional aviation is one that needs to be heard. That voice is always stronger when unified and representing as broad a church as possible. We are looking forward to being part of the RAAA community and working with and contributing to that community for the betterment of regional aviation and, of course, the regional communities that we serve.'

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Save the date!

16–18 June 2026

We don't know about you, but our diaries are filling fast, so before yours is full, please lock in the dates for our 2026 convention and trade show in Cairns.

Want to feature in the next RAAA News?

Email us with your story idea: administration@raaa.com.au