

## **Statement by AOPA SA president dr Koos Marais to AOPA SA Board Meeting held at Gilroy's on Wednesday 21 December 2011**

Welcome to this board meeting. All our meetings are open to the public. We have no secrets and we welcome observers. We are also prepared to take questions from members of the public and answer these questions but we ask that the questions are submitted in writing. So if you are an observer with a burning question, please write it down, stating your name, address and field of interest in aviation, and give it to one of the board members. We will answer them to the best of our ability.

AOPA and I have been subjected to more abuse, vilification, slander and insults over the last two weeks, than in the rest of my life put together, most of it on Avcom. It came about as the result of some suppressed emotions which suddenly found an escape when I posted, in very good faith, an educational video which I had made with great cost and effort to my self on request of the air force as part of the safety talk I had to deliver at the Ysterplaat Air Show. I was severely criticised for the amateurish style and for the content. Some of the criticism was even justified and good. I promise to make better videos in future. (This is a joke!)

A few days later I was forced to take a decision about the Bloemfontein flight restrictions. The CAA pleaded with me, promising that there won't be any restrictions whatsoever. Even more to the point, they also promised that there won't be any prosecutions of pilots who inadvertently failed to adhere to their one and only requirement, the application for a safety clearance number, a day in advance. Remember, there will be no restrictions, pilots are only required to get a clearance which is one phone call. And remember also, no prosecutions if you don't do it. We were told that 78 heads of state are expected to arrive and depart into and from Bloemfontein. In most countries in the world there would have been severe restrictions. Finally, the route via Kimberley is a very feasible alternative. It all boiled down to a simple decision. Do we once more go down the road of confrontation or do we work with the authorities? I made the decision, in the best interests of aviation in South Africa. But the critics latched on. The same people who criticised us last year for getting the court order against the authorities when we opposed the very severe flight restrictions, were now suddenly on the other side. Now they criticised me for not strongly opposing the "restrictions", which aren't restrictions anyway.

Remember, our biggest issue last year was that there had not been adequate consultation with interested and affected parties. This year it was quite different.

Then came the RAASA issue. From the outset it needs to be stressed that we have no personal issue with RAASA officers or directors. We wish them only the best and we want to see them continuing to do their work in a legal and transparent way and in accordance with the rules of good corporate governance. Our concerns developed after very careful studying of the new act. For some time we have been discussing this problem brought about by the new act being signed by pres. Zuma last year. This act is the problem. This act renders all licenses and authorities to fly invalid and we have been telling the authorities so, for a long time. They chose to ignore it. The act also renders RAASA without any legal basis for collecting and taking money from the public, something which they have been doing for the last three years. So we knew that RAASA was illegally issuing licenses and authorities to fly. We knew that renders all flights of the RAASA pilots and aircraft illegal, which of course is grounds for non-payment of insurance claims, our main concern. Then, the reports of non-payment of insurance claims filtered through. Our worst fears became a reality.

We are being told that the accident rate is rising and also that the non-type certified section, the RAASA section, is growing. So it is safe to assume that we are sitting on a time bomb. If we choose to ignore the time bomb and wait for the bereaved family members to be left destitute, because the insurance won't pay out the claims of their

deceased and beloved bread winners, because of the illegal nature of the flight, then we are shirking our responsibility. I as a pilot, husband and father, definitely want to know with certainty that my family members won't be left penniless because of my insurance not paying out. Is there anybody that want a widow to suffer through a seven year court case before an insurance claim is settled? For a fraction of the insured sum?

All of a sudden we were confronted with exactly this situation.

RAASA is a body with no oversight, other than themselves. It is not accountable to anyone. In fact RAASA requires the signing of an indemnity before any licence or authority to fly will be issued. How can this be? CAA does not require you to sign an indemnity before they issue your licence.

There exists no structure with formalised means of dealing with complaints against RAASA officials. I have personal experience of dealing with actions taken against our members by RAASA. With CAA, it is easy, with RAASA it is impossible. They quite simply are a law unto themselves.

RAASA exists in terms of a contract entered into between the previous commissioner, Colin Jordaan, and a few fortunate benefactors, the directors of RAASA. The contract was signed under the old act which may or may not have been legal. Fact is the new act renders the contract invalid but fortunately that contract expires on the 31st of December 2011. We have persistently asked for details about any new contract but have been persistently denied any answers to our questions. We have even been told that a new contract had already been signed. We asked to see it and got no answer. The 31st of December is drawing closer and we still don't know. Why all the secrecy?

We have the duty to protect the rights of our members. We are extremely worried about the legality of RAASA and their actions, because it may have a most severe impact on the lives of innocent dependents following the tragedy of the loss of a family member. We cannot sit around and wait for events to take place and then complain. We have to be proactive. We want to know that our families are as safe as our skies. But we don't get any answers. RAASA and CAA play the ostrich card, perhaps we say, because they know that they are wrong but won't admit it in public. Well, now we will force them to deal with it, openly and publicly.

Because RAASA board members are such "nice" people, it can't be accepted that RAASA's illegal status be maintained and entrenched, while innocent, bereaved families are left without financial security.

The reaction on Avcom has been most telling. The emotional outbursts came from a group of about six, very verbose, people. These same people have been on the forefront hurling abuse at AOPA. They have resorted to the worst kind of behaviour I have ever experienced, but it had a good side. It gave me cause to reflect deeply on my motives and that of AOPA. Why do I subject myself to all this? Why do I bother to work for AOPA, for free? Why do I spend all these hundreds of hours and all this money? Why don't I just resign and work on all my other projects? It certainly looks attractive. I get no satisfaction from being abused and insulted. I get no pleasure from having meetings with CAA, pleading with sponsors and answering hundreds of e-mails.

I searched my soul for reasons why I do it and I came upon only one answer.

Life is not about me.

I live to serve others. I have literally been forced into this position. I do it for love. Love of others, love of my country, love of aviation, yes love of life and of God Himself. If that is not good enough for you, please say so and I will resign immediately. As I say, it certainly looks appealing to once again be the master of my own time. To be free of the politics and the abuse and the insults.

Lastly, what about AOPA and unity in aviation? Why don't we just all become one happy family? If only, if only...Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see one very strong body representing aviation in South Africa. I don't care whether it is AOPA or anything or

anybody else. But, as things stand, AOPA is the only organisation with any credibility and latitude of interest in aviation. It is the only organisation with the means and the backbone and the guts to stand up and fight for the rights of aviation. AOPA represents, officially, because we are officially affiliated with IAOPA, the rights and interests of more than 440 000 pilots and aircraft owners worldwide. It is the only body recognised by ICAO. ICAO does not recognise RAASA or Aero Club, but they recognise AOPA. I urge you all to increase AOPA's membership base even more.

So I will continue to serve AOPA, to the best of my ability, at least for the foreseeable future and trust that you all will join me. I will not be deterred by the critics. I will not succumb to the threats.

I am sad to say that recent events have proven how right we are. There are too many people with hidden agendas, who want to control aviation because of the supposed "thrill" of the "power". They are the most vociferous critics. We can not yield to them. We have to carry on serving our fellow members because they have placed their trust in us, because we are doing the right thing.