



Australian Government
Australian Transport Safety Bureau

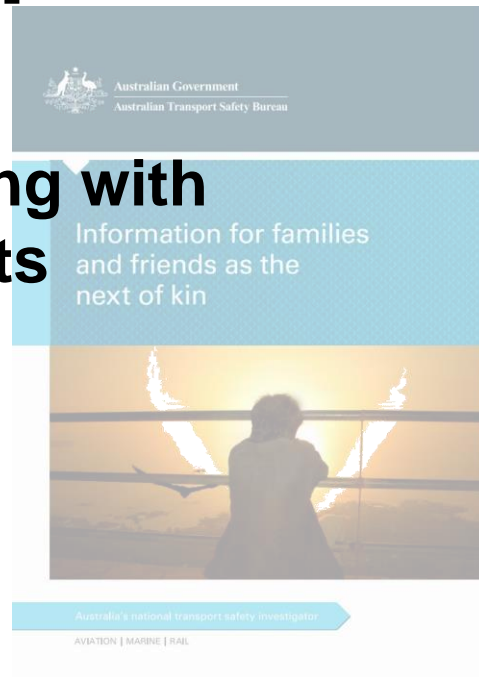
ATSB

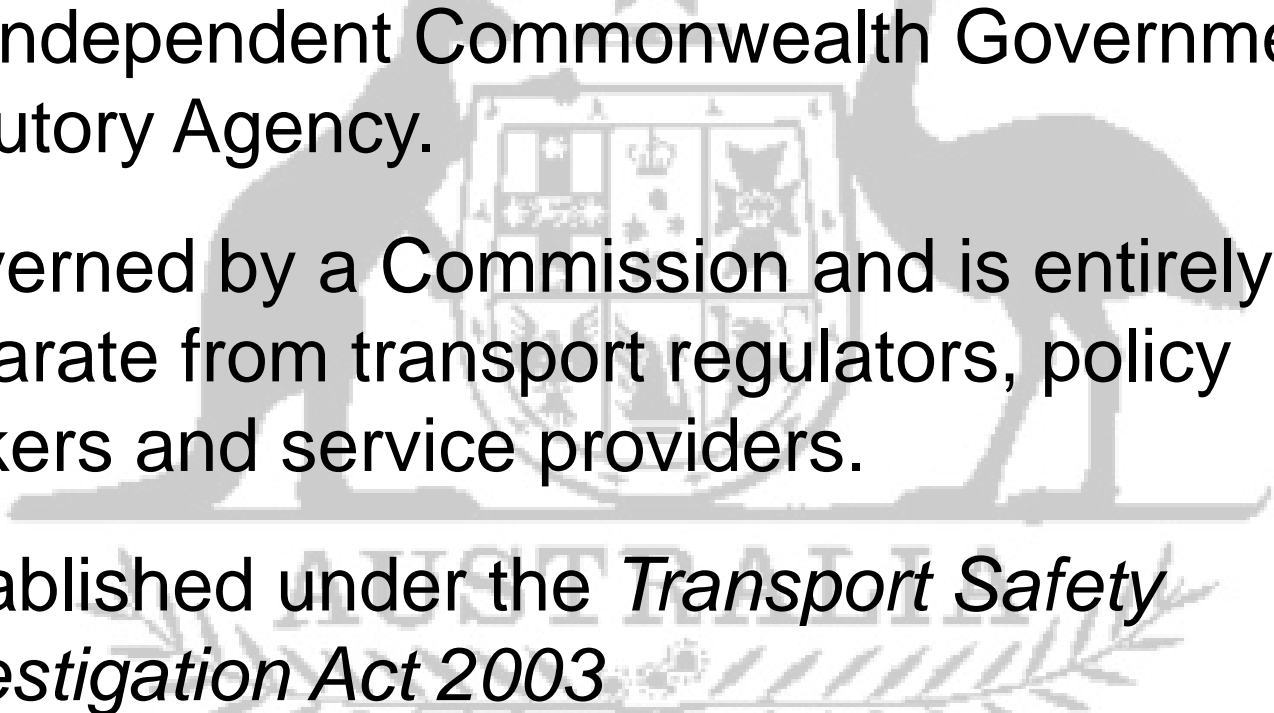
Working with Next of Kin

ATSB procedures and experiences dealing with families of fatal general aviation accidents

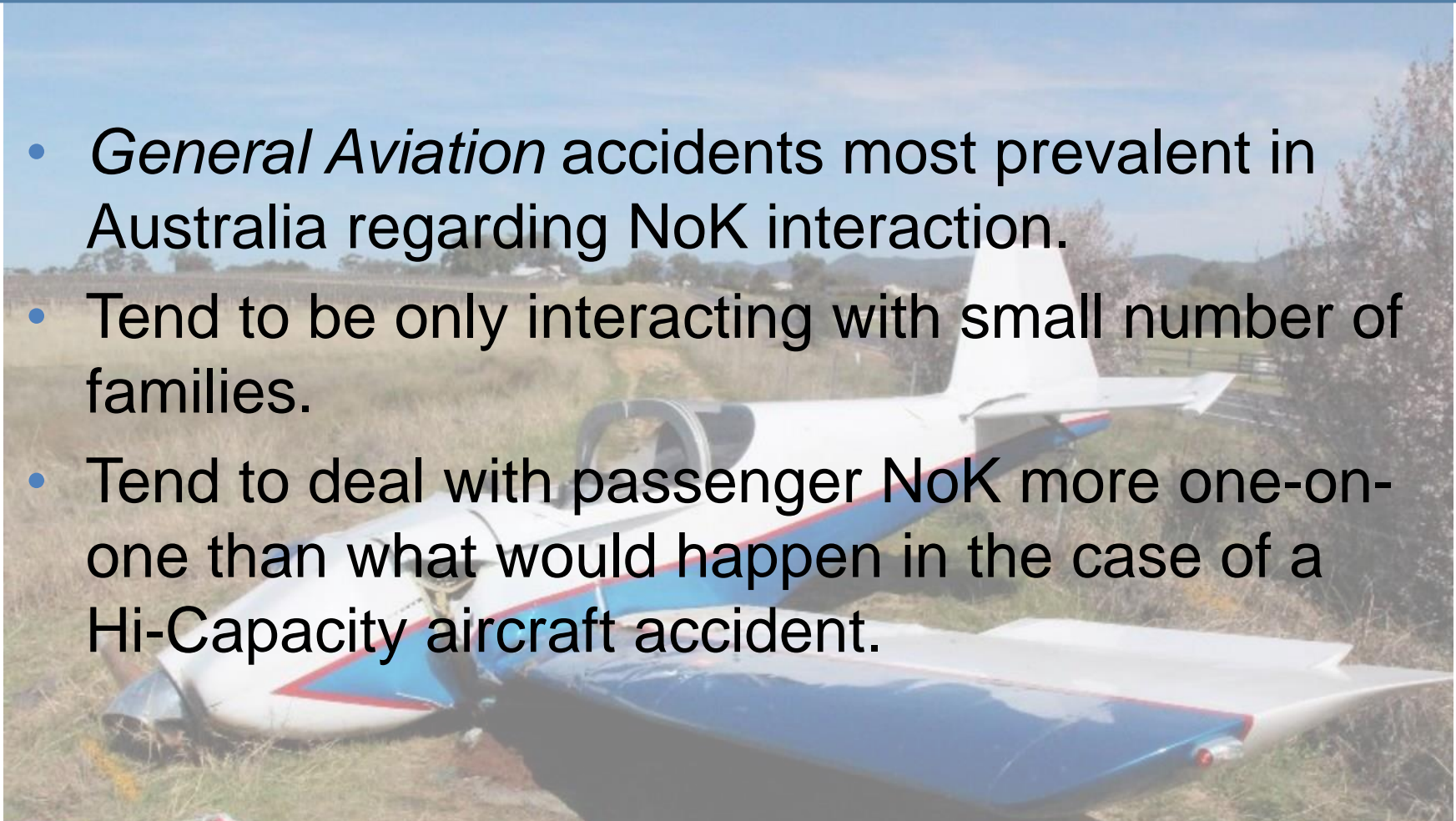
Presented by
Rob Chopin
Manager Transport Safety

AVIATION | MARINE | RAIL



- 
- An independent Commonwealth Government statutory Agency.
 - Governed by a Commission and is entirely separate from transport regulators, policy makers and service providers.
 - Established under the *Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003*

- *General Aviation* accidents most prevalent in Australia regarding NoK interaction.
- Tend to be only interacting with small number of families.
- Tend to deal with passenger NoK more one-on-one than what would happen in the case of a Hi-Capacity aircraft accident.



General approach

- Who are NoK?
 - Immediate family of deceased
 - Potentially additional relatives and close friends
- Critical to communicate effectively
 - Generally NoK of operational crew very important to communicate with

General approach

- Key NoK interactions:
 - Initial contact
 - Detailed initial briefing
 - Ongoing liaison
 - Detailed factual briefing



Grief awareness

- Many different ways people grieve
- Commonly experienced and established stages
 - People generally do not progress through stages in a linear, timely or predictable manner
 - Some NoK may be in a highly distressed state for months, perhaps years
- Empathise, DON'T say “I know / I understand”!

Grief awareness

- Investigators are not trained councillors
- Suggest they have a support person at meetings
- If NoK highly distressed, perhaps suggest:
 - Seek support from family/friends/doctor
 - Support from Coroner's office
 - Support from relevant community organisations

Interacting with NoK

Overview

- Considerations:
 - Needs/wishes may vary greatly, hard to predict
 - Know and use their relative's name
 - Keep expectations clear and simple
 - May need several NoK contacts for split families
 - Don't make promises you cannot keep

Interacting with NoK

Overview

- Considerations:
 - Try not to take criticism personally
 - Preferably 2x investigators when talking to NoK
 - Develop a clear contact plan for NoK
 - Keep realistic contact timeframes (eg 4-6 weeks)
 - Don't let contact times slip – better to be early
 - Treat NoK respectfully

Interacting with NoK

Initial liaison with Coroners' officers

- Initial contact made through Coroner's officer
- Ensure Coroner's officer advises if NoK wish to visit accident site
- Obtain local support service info from Coroner's officer, should the need arise in NoK briefings
- Keep Coroner's officer informed when we meet with NoK

Interacting with NoK

Initial contact

- Preferable within first week, and face-to-face
- Initial contact points to cover:
 - Introduction and expressing sympathies
 - Who we are, what we do
 - Plan time and attendees for *Detailed initial briefing*
 - Provide contact details, ATSB brochures
 - Answer any initial questions

Interacting with NoK

Initial contact

- Other considerations:
 - If face-to-face cannot be achieved, use telephone
 - Determine when funeral is to avoid calling that day
 - Plan for *Detailed briefing* after the funeral/memorial
 - If *Detailed briefing* in several weeks, detail info required
 - Emphasise that this is routine in investigations

Interacting with NoK

Detailed initial briefing

- Two main parts of NoK briefing, order of priority:
 - Who we are, why we investigate, what we will be doing
 - Obtaining information about the deceased
- First part is most important initially
- All further contact should emphasise order of priority

Interacting with NoK

Detailed initial briefing

- Cover same basic information as with initial contact
- Discuss various parallel investigations (police/regulator/etc.) and or independence
- What we have done so far, next steps
- Keeping an open mind, early days in the investigation

Interacting with NoK

Detailed initial briefing

- Seeking personal history – standard protocol
- Discuss report writing and publication process
- Regularly ask if they have questions during briefing
- Investigators to refer to ATSB *Critical Incident Stress Management* (CISM) training

Interacting with NoK

Ongoing liaison

- Maintain regular contact \approx 1 to 3 months
- NoK should be encouraged to call IIC to request update or pass on useful information
- Contact NoK **BEFORE** report releases/accident anniversary
- Empathetic but professional

Interacting with NoK

Detailed factual briefing

- Prior to release of each factual report
- Preferably face-to-face
- Include significant factual information
- Brief in a non-technical manner, exercise patience
- Exercise discretion with showing photos - seek manager (firstly) and also NoK approval

Support for our investigators

Escalation procedure

- If NoK become demanding or require excessive contact:
 - Escalate to next level (Manager, Director etc.)
 - Brief of issues experienced
 - Manager/Director may takeover NoK contact duties.

Support for our investigators

Stress and critical stress management

- Emotional interactions can be stressful for investigators
- Pre-prepare for each NoK interaction:
 - NoK range of emotions (angry, tearful, demanding etc.)
 - Maintain awareness of NoK relationships with victim
 - Avoid questions that elicit emotional responses
 - Keep things business like.

Support for our investigators

NoK contacting team out-of-hours

- How NoK interactions are handled has an enduring impact
- Politely and consistently asserting the boundaries of your support to the NoK will assist in maintaining a professional relationship

Support for our investigators

NoK contacting team out-of-hours

- Out of Hours and Weekends:
 - If quick response, answer question/s
 - If longer, call back when in the office with the evidence
- On leave:
 - Pre-brief NoK before heading off on leave
 - Call back when in the office/get Manager to call NoK
 - If not investigation related, advise you are not a grief councillor.

Support for our investigators

NoK face-to-face meetings

- ATSB policy that 2 investigators attend
- This provides:
 - Support and backup for investigators
 - Potentially provide a different viewpoint to NoK:
 - ensure that NoK do not misinterpret or claim an incorrect ATSB finding or comment

Support for our investigators

Exit strategies

- NoK contact can develop into long-term relationship
- Some NoK may want to keep in touch years after – investigators should address concerns but nothing further
- Advise NoK to seek counselling if still emotional



Australian Government
Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Information for families and friends as the next of kin



Australia's national transport safety investigator

AVIATION | MARINE | RAIL

