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Newsletter from The Commercial Aviation Association of Southern Africa NPC

From our CEO

CAASA and our take on General Aviation in Southern Africa - Opportunities and Challenges in 2025

The elements facing the CAASA member's flight plan for 2025 is indeed a complex and challenging environment - still not fully recovered from the COVID epidemic.

The aviation sector in Southern Africa continues to evolve as we enter 2025, and while challenges remain, opportunities abound. General aviation (GA), the backbone of connectivity and development in many parts of this region, has faced triumphs and trials over the past year. We must embrace the possibilities of drones, and regulators must become nimbler to adapt to evolving needs instead of lagging with outdated regulations.

As always, we take this opportunity to thank our operators, pilots, and industry stakeholders for their contributions to aviation. With the road gridlock in our city areas becoming a reality in the next few years - the need for integrated transport and safe public transport aligned with aviation is a necessity with the decisions made today that will shape the future of Southern Africa's GA industry for years to come.

Challenges Facing Southern African GA

Economic Constraints

The rising cost of aviation fuel, maintenance, and insurance has become a pressing issue for GA operators in the region. With the rand struggling against international currencies and high inflation impacting business operations, smaller operators and private owners are under immense pressure to remain viable.

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Regulatory Complexities and Bureaucracy

A growing concern in the GA sector is the excessive bureaucracy imposed by regulators, coupled with a limited understanding of the practical intricacies of aviation operations and inefficient regulatory requirements. Recreational aviation has seen a marked decline in participation as pilots face increasingly stringent licensing requirements, complex regulatory frameworks, and time-consuming administrative burdens. The regulator in South Africa still fails to follow the world's best practices, and if it listened to industry, it could become a world leader and trendsetter.

Many recreational pilots that form the breeding ground and create the interest for the next generations of pilots have opted out of flying entirely due to these hurdles, citing frustration with the regulator's lack of practical solutions and sensitivity to industry needs. This decline impacts recreational aviation and the broader GA ecosystem, which relies on a thriving community of private aviators for skill development, mentorship, and economic activity.

Maintenance Regulations and Engine Life Policies

The recent expiry of the exemption offering relief from the withdrawn AIC 18/19 with convoluted notices has left operators scrambling to adapt to new requirements hindered by the inability of the regulator to answer direct questions. The waiver issued in late 2024, while intended to ease the burden, has created confusion in the industry. The interpretation appears to mandate the grounding of aircraft with engines surpassing the 12-year calendar life unless fully overhauled. It disrupts years of practical and internationally recognised practices, allowing engines to operate "on condition" under proper monitoring and management. It should be developed especially for countries with older fleets that can continue delivering exemplary service in the next 10 to 15 years.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

While South Africa boasts a relatively developed aviation infrastructure, many neighbouring countries lack the same support. Poorly maintained airstrips, limited navigational aids, and insufficient facilities in remote regions present ongoing challenges. These deficits directly affect access to essential areas, including significant tourism hubs like the Kruger National Park, where smaller airstrips and feeder airports are vital for supporting the region's tourism economy.

Climate Change Impact

Southern Africa's aviation sector is feeling the effects of climate change, from unpredictable weather patterns to rising environmental scrutiny. The need to adopt sustainable practices and reduce emissions is increasingly urgent for GA, which often operates in rural and ecologically sensitive areas. This challenge is particularly significant for operations in protected areas such as Kruger National Park, where balancing conservation efforts and tourism demands is critical.

Opportunities and Focus Areas for Growth

Medical and Humanitarian Aviation

In Southern Africa, GA has proven indispensable by delivering critical services to remote regions. It directly supports medical evacuations, supply runs, and disaster relief, showcasing its unique ability to make an impact. For areas adjacent to Kruger National Park, GA operations often assist with wildlife conservation efforts and anti-poaching activities, further demonstrating its role as a lifeline in the region.

Tourism and Eco-tourism

Tourism is one of Southern Africa's most significant economic drivers, and GA is integral to this success. Iconic destinations such as Kruger National Park rely on light aircraft to connect visitors with remote lodges and safari camps. With tourism numbers rebounding post-pandemic, GA operators have an opportunity to expand their role, offering sustainable travel solutions to high-value clients. By investing in quieter and greener aircraft, operators can align with eco-tourism trends while preserving the delicate balance between tourism and conservation. This, however, needs the commitment of the regulator to make the registration and addition onto AOC seamless and rapid compared with the excessive time delays currently experienced.

Advancements in Aviation Technology

Emerging technologies, including electric and hybrid-electric aircraft, offer promising solutions for Southern Africa's GA sector. These innovations are particularly well-suited for short-haul flights and training. Demonstration projects in this space could pave the way for more sustainable and cost-effective tourism operations.

Training and Skills Development

South Africa's aviation training industry remains a leader on the continent. Expanding pilot and technician training opportunities, particularly for underrepresented groups, can strengthen the talent pool across Southern Africa.

Regional Integration

Efforts to harmonise regulations and modernise airspace management across Southern Africa present a significant opportunity. Better regional coordination can enhance cross-border GA operations, making it easier for tourists and businesses to access destinations like Kruger National Park from neighbouring countries such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

Leading tourist destinations

Kruger National Park is not just one of South Africa's premier tourist attractions but also a focal point for GA activity in the region. Planned airports like Cape Winelands will bring easy and direct access to our premier tourism areas, so we must prioritise their addition. These connections facilitate tourism and support conservation initiatives, including anti-poaching patrols and wildlife monitoring. Private charters, light aircraft, and helicopter services provide critical links between remote lodges and major urban centres, and there will be growing opportunities provided the government and the regulator focus on relaxing and easing non-beneficial regulations. There must be a balance between safety and growth and excessive safety and bureaucracy to the detriment of operational efficiency. Thus, we must address growth in the aviation sector and bring it back into equitable balance. As tourism grows, GA operators must find ways to balance increased demand with environmental sustainability. Electrifying operations and adopting quieter aircraft are practical solutions that could significantly reduce the industry's impact on wildlife and local ecosystems. Additionally, upgrading smaller airstrips and improving support facilities around the park will ensure that GA remains a reliable and efficient mode of transportation for visitors.

What Lies Ahead

General aviation in Southern Africa is at a critical juncture. The rising operating costs, bureaucratic hurdles, and declining recreational aviation participation threaten to erode the sector's vitality. However, with targeted interventions, there is immense potential to turn these challenges into opportunities for sustainable growth. Regulators must take a more collaborative and nuanced approach to governance, recognising the unique dynamics of GA and the importance of recreational aviation to the industry's future. By simplifying processes, fostering skills, and embracing technology, Southern Africa can ensure a thriving GA sector that supports connectivity, tourism, and conservation across the region.

As we move forward, let us ensure that the skies over Southern Africa remain vibrant and accessible for all, from recreational pilots to operators serving Kruger National Park and beyond. Safe travels, clear skies, and prosperous horizons await those who embrace the future of aviation.

Kevin



Commercial Aviation Association
of Southern Africa NPC

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Come Fly with Us

Welcome once again to your new year in aviation. We at CAASA wish you and your team a positive and prosperous period ahead.

To that end, CAASA would like to support our valued member's endeavours by offering the opportunity to participate and contribute to our monthly newsletters in the months ahead.

All we need is:

1. Your company logo (JPG or PDF)
2. Your company overview, along with the products and/or services you offer (long short form)
3. Share any significant milestones (again, long or short form and any supporting visuals (JPG or PDF) – Optional
4. All your contact details, including your website and social media links.

Do this, and we'll rack and stack your contribution for inclusion. We'll also share the final copy and the laid-out page(s) with you for review and approval before publication.

Get involved and reap the benefits of getting your business in front of curated, aviation-focused peers pro bono!

Reach out to our General Manager, Melissa Sewgolam (melissa@caasa.co.za) and she'll make sure your voice is heard amongst our fellow members and beyond.

With 80 years of legacy and reputation, your contribution can only help foster growth in your business and across our critically important aviation sector.



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Member's News



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Thought Leadership

Is aviation a dying industry or a sustainable workforce?

Authored by **Kerrie Enslin** - Solenta ATO Manager: Training Resources



As the aviation industry grows, an urgent challenge looms: a critical workforce gap that threatens to disrupt its arc of growth, operational excellence, and technological innovation. The sector needs to attract, nurture, and retain skilled professionals across its diverse roles.

The industry stands at a critical crossroads, with a significant portion of the aviation workforce nearing retirement. Nearly half of the professionals in essential roles will retire within the next decade, creating an opportunity to welcome fresh talent and a challenge to preserve invaluable expertise.

The aviation workforce has gained a wealth of knowledge through years of hands-on experience and deep technical expertise. As they depart, their absence will inevitably create an experience gap that will take time to bridge. To address this, organisations must prioritise structured knowledge transfer programs to preserve retiring professionals' valuable insights and skills.

By fostering mentorship and cross-generational learning, the industry can effectively bridge this gap and empower the next generation to build on this foundation of expertise.

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Not only does the aviation industry stand to lose half of its experience, but it is also undergoing a rapid transformation driven by technological advancements.

This shift is reshaping the skills required to thrive in the sector. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, data analytics, and electric propulsion systems are redefining aviation operations, calling for a workforce adept in traditional aviation principles and cutting-edge innovations.

To keep pace, the skills to manage, maintain, and innovate with these technologies must become equally mainstream, bridging the gap between the foundational knowledge of aviation and the demands of a rapidly evolving future.

Recruitment is only half the battle; retaining talent is just as critical to the industry's sustainability. Investing in continuous training programs empowers employees to adapt to evolving technologies while advancing their careers. Mentorship programs, where seasoned professionals share their knowledge with new hires, offer a dual benefit of skill transfer and employee engagement.

Equally important is fostering a work culture rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion. With younger professionals increasingly prioritising employers that align with their values, organisations can strengthen loyalty and job satisfaction by cultivating inclusive environments that embrace diverse perspectives and encourage collaborative innovation.

About the author

Kerrie's adventures began at 18 as an au pair in North Carolina, USA. She then moved on to similar work in the Bahamas before becoming a NAUI open water dive instructor.

After touring the world on a 188-foot steel-hulled barquentine (sailing ship), she returned to school and completed her studies as a South African Field Guide. After many adventures with the Big 5, she married and raised two wonderful children.

After leaving the wildlife world, Kerrie joined Qwila Air, based at Lanseria, as the charter person. Her aviation career then took a steep learning curve when she moved to Solenta Aviation in 2008.

She started in the rostering and training department, filling many roles throughout her 17 years. Kerrie is now the Solenta ATO Manager: Training Resources, looking after five aircraft fleets, pilots, and cabin crew training. She also maintains a solid working relationship with the SACAA and many other authorities to ensure ATO and training compliance.

In her spare time, she enjoys working within the South African regulatory space to stay current and remain regulatorily compliant.

Until next month, may your flight path be clear and prosperous.