

# Changes for the Agricultural Sector

Changes that came into effect in April 2016 have seen the agricultural rating structure split into three specializations: top dressing, spraying, and an aerial vertebrate toxic agent (VTA) rating. There's also a new category of flight examiner for agriculture.

**A**longside these changes, the pilot chemical rating refresher requirement has been increased from three to five years, and some of the privileges that an E-cat instructor previously had have been removed. For example, an E-cat can no longer test for Grade 1 and 2 agricultural pilot rating issues. That's now the job of the agricultural flight examiner.

"E-cats still train pilots and do annual competency assessments," says Gary Langman, CAA's Senior Technical Specialist – Agricultural. "They can also separately issue aerial top dressing, aerial spraying, and aerial VTA ratings, but the initial prime agricultural rating, which will include at least one of these specialised ratings, must be issued by the agricultural flight examiner."

An agricultural flight examiner must also hold an E-category Flight Instructor Rating. Therefore the examiner has all the privileges of an E-cat instructor, providing they're current. Previously, to be current, E-cats had to hold only an agricultural rating and have completed 10 hours of operational flying in the previous 90 days. Now, they must pass a competency assessment every two years to remain current.

As was the case previously, you'll initially receive your prime rating (Grade 2), then after 1000 hours of productive agricultural flying you can sit the Grade 1 test. Now, once you have your Grade 2, you may also add one or more of the specializations by completing further training and being assessed for the ratings.

One of the drivers for the change is safety. Three years ago, the CAA undertook a sector risk profile on agricultural aviation and that highlighted deficiencies in pilot training standards. Creating the agricultural flight examiner aligns the agricultural sector with the airline and general aviation sectors.

"This is trying to lift standards and minimise risk," says Gary. "So now pilots have to be assessed in each competency rather than just getting a blanket rating."

"In many ways, this is just codifying what is already happening in a large part of the industry."

"Often, if you did your training in aerial topdressing only, then an operator would only allow you to perform that. You'd need to do further training before the operator would allow you to do spraying or VTA."

The CAA recognises that VTA is essentially topdressing but with extra controls due to the highly toxic nature of the material being dropped. An annual competency assessment for VTA can be done at the same time as an aerial topdressing assessment, providing all the extra controls and requirements are covered off in the ground session, usually by oral assessment.

Previously, the all-encompassing agricultural rating didn't always assess particular areas of expertise. That meant a pilot could do the most convenient competency check at the time, but then do most of their work in a different competency.

"The flight examiners will assess all new E-cat instructors and conduct their biennial competency checks," says Gary. "That should raise the overall standards of agricultural pilots." ■

