

OPS 007

**Management and use of Special Task
Operation radio call signs**

Standard

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1 Background

- 1.1 Aircraft regularly involved in firefighting and emergency support may be assigned individual call signs, principally for use in radio communications. Assigned call signs may also be used in other documentation and systems to identify particular aircraft. Assigned radio call signs are referred to as Special Task Operations (STO) call signs.
- 1.2 STO call signs are intended to:
 - a. unambiguously identify firefighting and emergency aircraft in air traffic systems;
 - b. indicate to Air Traffic Services (ATS) personnel the nature of an aircraft operation in order that appropriate priority and assistance may be provided;
 - c. unambiguously identify operational aircraft to fire and emergency agency personnel;
 - d. assist with situational awareness for personnel involved in management, support and supervision of aerial operations; and
 - e. simplify agency radio communications by using call signs that are compatible with agency radio systems and consistent with non-aviation operations.
- 1.3 In radio and related communications STO call signs may be used, where appropriate:
 - a. in ATS notification and communication systems, including on VHF-AM ATS radio frequencies; and
 - b. in fire and emergency agency communications systems;and accordingly must meet legal and operational requirements of all systems.
- 1.4 STO call signs are utilised to ensure unambiguous references to aircraft in national support systems, such as the Australian Fire Aircraft Monitoring System (AFAMS).
- 1.5 This Standard is provided to:
 - a. define a rigorous, quality-controlled mechanism for determining, allocating and recording STO call signs that ensures that assigned call signs meet legal and operational requirements; and
 - b. provide guidance on the usage of STO call signs.



2 Basis for STO call signs

2.1 STO call signs available for use in fire and emergency operations are defined in the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP), published by AirServices Australia.

The AIP provides the following¹:

“Aircraft engaged in special task operations, and with the Agreement of ATS may use a call-sign indicative of the nature of the task, with a numerical suffix (if applicable), eg

Type of Operation	Radio Telephony Designator (call-sign)	Flight Plan Designator
Police	POLAIR	POL
Police Priority	POLAIR RED	POLR
Federal Police	FEDPOL	FPL
Federal Police Priority	FEDPOL RED	FPLR
Ambulance	AMBULANCE	AM
Rescue mission	RESCUE	RSCU
Aerial Survey	SURVEY	SVY
⇒ Fire intelligence gathering	FIRESPOッター	SPTR
⇒ Coordination of firebombing aircraft	BIRDOG	BDOG
⇒ General fire support tasks (light rotary)	FIREBIRD	FBIR
⇒ Firebombing	BOMBER	BMBR
⇒ General fire support tasks (medium rotary)	HELITAK	HLTK
⇒ Remote sensing fire operations	FIRESKAN	FSCN
NSW Parks and Wildlife Service	PARKAIR	PKAR
Television media operations	TEEVEE	TV

Note 1: Reproduced from AIP GEN 3.4 para 4.23 – 24 of 17 Nov 2011. The AIP always remains the authoritative source of call signs and designators. Pilots must check any current version of the AIP before using STO call signs in the ATS system.





Call-sign suffix numbers are allocated as follow:

- NSW/ACT commencing with 2 (eg 210, 214, 223)
- VIC commencing with 3
- QLD commencing with 4
- SA commencing with 5
- WA commencing with 6
- TAS commencing with 7
- NT commencing with 8
- Defence commencing with 9”

2.2 The AIP also provides the following guidance:

“Flight numbers and call-sign suffix numbers should be limited to 2 or 3 characters and take into account of numbers already in use by the operator and other agencies in the intended...environment, operational area or nearby.”

“When selecting an aircraft identification number or call-sign suffix operators should avoid using numbers that correlate with:

- a. ending in zero or five to avoid confusion with headings
- b. Potential level utilisation (eg 3000, 500, 350 etc)
- c. Emergency codes (eg 7600, 7700 etc)
- d. Numerical aircraft types (767, 330 etc)

3 Determination of firefighting STO call signs

3.1 The call sign determination and allocation procedures provide in this Standard refer only to the firefighting call signs as designated in the Table at 2.1 above with “☐”. The other call signs are provided for information.

3.2 To ensure consistency, call signs will be determined as follows:

- a. All firefighting aircraft STO call signs will consist of:
 - i. an AirServices Australia approved alpha call sign appropriate to the type, class and role of the aircraft as provided in Table A below, plus
 - ii. a numeric suffix of three numerals, with the first numeral indicating the state or territory responsible for allocating the call sign in accordance with the procedures in this Standard, as provided in Table B overleaf.
- b. In determining call signs, where practicable and if there is a reasonable possibility of confusion, the AIP guidance provided at paragraph 2.2 above should be taken into account. As firefighting STO callsign suffixes are only used in conjunction with an alpha call sign, confusion with headings and flight levels is not normally experienced.



Table A

FIRESPOTTER	Fixed-wing only	Light fixed-wing aircraft used primarily for fire intelligence gathering. Normally applied only to single-engine aircraft but may be used for multi-engine aircraft used primarily for fire intelligence gathering.
BIRDOG	Fixed-wing only	Light fixed-wing aircraft used primarily for air attack supervision. Normally applied only to multi-engine aircraft but may be used for single-engine aircraft used primarily for air attack supervision.
FIREBIRD	Rotary-wing only	Light helicopters used for general fire support work, including air attack supervision, intelligence gathering, incendiary dropping and incidental firebombing. Normally only applied to Type 3 or Type 4 helicopters, but may be applied to larger helicopters if used exclusively for general support tasks (and not for firebombing or tactical fire crew insertion).
BOMBER	Fixed-wing only	Type 1, 2, 3 or 4 fixed-wing aircraft used for firebombing. Note: replaces previous "Firebomber".
HELITAK	Rotary-wing only	Medium or heavy helicopters used primarily for firebombing or tactical crew insertion. Normally applied only to Type 1 and Type 2 helicopters but may be applied to larger Type 3 helicopters that are primarily used for firebombing.
FIRESCAN	Fixed-wing only	Fixed-wing aircraft equipped with specialised intelligence gathering and mapping equipment. Normally only applied to aircraft that regularly survey incidents from heights above the general fire traffic areas and whose tasking may require flying fixed patterns as well as regular transition between visual and instrument meteorological conditions.



Table B

Numeral 1	Represents state or territory or national agency <u>allocating</u> call sign as per paragraph 5 below	0 National 1 National 2 NSW & ACT 3 Victoria Queensland 4 SA 5 6 WA 7 Tasmania 8 NT 9 National [Defence]
Numeral 2	Use as required	(see Note 2, 3)
Numeral 3	Use as required	

Note 2 - some Members may use Numeral 2 as an indicator of the volume carried by firebombing aircraft, eg Bomber 481 carries 800 US gallons, however this is not universally applied.

Note 3 - some Members may use Numeral 2 to represent a type or class of aircraft, for example:

- 0,1 Smaller, recon, intell and general use aircraft - FW & RW
- 2 [various]
- 3,4 Medium and heavy helicopters 5,6 Fixed wing bombers
- 7,8 Other fixed-wing aircraft
- 9 As required;

however this is NOT a requirement and is not universally applied.

4 Business rules for allocation of firefighting STO call signs

4.1 Each state and territory shall be the custodian of firefighting STO call signs whose suffix commences with the specified Numeral 1 in Table B above.

NSW shall be the custodian of firefighting STO call signs whose suffix commences with 2, on behalf of NSW and ACT.

NAFC shall be the custodian of firefighting STO call signs whose suffix commences with 0 or 1 (with permission of AirServices Australia) and 9 (with permission of the Australian Defence Forces).

4.2 Each state and territory shall nominate a single agency to administer STO call signs for which that state or territory is custodian; and shall nominate to NAFC a point of contact in that agency for the purposes of administering call-signs.

4.3 Call signs will be allocated at the discretion of the custodian agency. Normally only the following aircraft will be allocated firefighting STO call signs:

Aircraft owned or operated by a state or territory agency involved in firefighting or fire management;



Aircraft contracted to be available on a term basis (ie for pre-determined minimum period of time during a fire or prescribed burning season);

Aircraft subject to a contract to be available on a call-when-needed basis;

Aircraft regularly used or likely to be used on a call-when-needed or contracted basis, as determined by the relevant state or territory agency.

4.4 Each custodian may allocate call signs for:

Aircraft owned or operated by any agency of the custodian state or territory;

Aircraft contracted to be available on a term basis by the custodian state or territory, or in the case of NAFC contracts, where the custodian is the initial Liable Member. Where an aircraft is contracted to be available in more than one state or territory, the state or territory in which the normal home base of the contractor is located will allocate the call sign, unless otherwise agreed;

Aircraft available on a call-when-needed basis, where the normal home base of the contractor is located in the custodian state or territory, unless otherwise agreed;

Other aircraft as agreed between the relevant custodians for pragmatic reasons (for example where an aircraft that regularly operates overseas already displays call sign markings or markings allocated by the U.S. Air Tanker Board; or when the location of the contractor's home base or the location of the Nominated Operational Base or the initial Liable Member is not otherwise a logical determinant of the suffix).

4.5 Any unique STO call sign may only be allocated to one aircraft at any one time;

Any single aircraft may be allocated only one STO call sign at any one time;

All allocated STO call signs shall be linked to a specified unique aircraft registration marking.

4.6 Firefighting STO call signs are only considered allocated when recorded in the National Firefighting Call Sign Register as per paragraph 5.3 below, and the allocation has been advised to AirServices Australia.

5 Process for allocation of firefighting STO call signs

5.1 NAFC will maintain a national register of allocated firefighting STO call signs on behalf of all custodians.

5.2 NAFC will ensure that the version of the national register that is current at any point in time is publicly available on an appropriate website, along with nominated contacts for custodians.

5.3 Process for allocation of a firefighting STO call sign: (Overleaf)



State or territory agency identifies need for owned or contracted aircraft to have STO call sign

Aircraft operator identifies need for STO call sign



Request STO callsign from appropriate custodian (via nominated contact)



Custodian checks National Register to confirm no allocation is currently made to aircraft registration



Custodian determines appropriate STO call sign in accordance with guidance in this Standard, or refers allocation to alternative custodian if appropriate



Custodian confirms from National Register that proposed call sign is not currently allocated



Custodian advises National Register of proposed allocation against aircraft registration by email to admin@nafc.org.au



Custodian advises aircraft operator of proposed allocation



NAFC updates National Register, publishes updated [register](#) and advises [AirServices Australia](#).



Call sign is now allocated



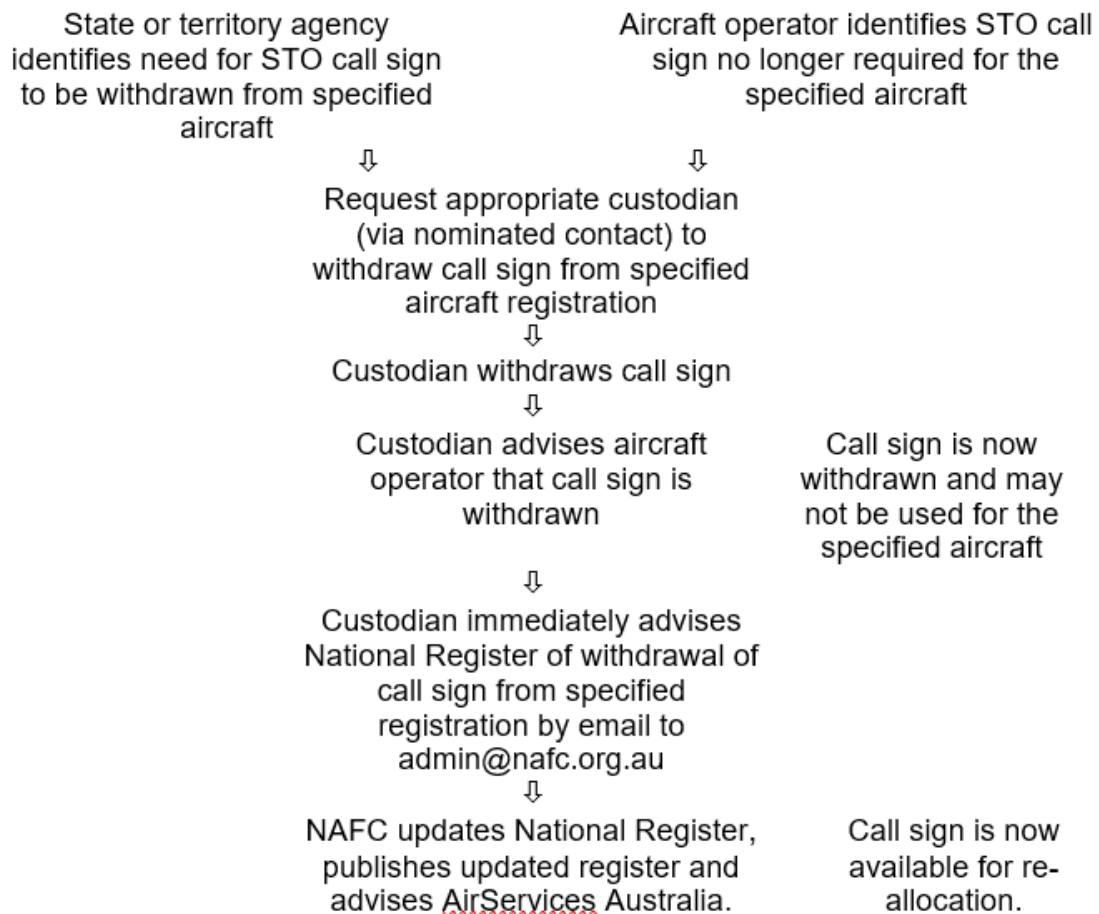
Aircraft operator receives confirmation of allocation by reference to National Register



Call sign may be used.



5.4 Process for withdrawal of a firefighting STO call sign:



5.5 The National Firefighting Call Sign Register may also record non-firefighting STO call signs relevant to fire and emergency operations (eg RESCUE, PARKAIR) for ease of reference, but shall distinguish such allocations from firefighting STO call signs and shall not be an authoritative record of allocation for non-firefighting STO call signs.

6 Use of firefighting STO call signs

- 6.1 Pilots must ensure that use of allocated STO call signs is in accordance with the current version of the AIP.
- 6.2 Firefighting STO call signs must only be used in agency radio communications and documents in accordance with the relevant state or territory agency procedures.
- 6.3 Aircraft involved in firefighting that do not have an allocated STO call sign should continue to use their civil or defence registration marking based call sign as per the AIP.
- 6.4 Aircraft with allocated firefighting STO call signs shall only utilise the STO call signs when operating under direction of the appropriate state/territory agency or in directly allied operations (eg ferrying, tank testing, training). Normal registration based call signs or flight numbers as per the AIP should be used at all other times.



- 6.5 In ATS or agency radio communications, initial contact is established by using the call sign of the station being called, followed by the call sign of the calling station.
- 6.6 The AIP prescribes that within Australian airspace, “group form”: is the preferred method of transmitting call signs. For consistency, group form should therefore be used for call signs in all ATS and agency radio communications.

Group form is the grouping of numbers into pairs, or where a number ending in 00 is spoken in hundreds. For three digit numbers, the second (except zero) and third numbers are grouped. Examples are as follows:

- FIREBIRD 122 Spoken as “FIREBIRD ONE TWENTY TWO”
- BIRDOG 200 “BIRDOG TWO HUNDRED”
- FIREBIRD 102 “FIREBIRD ONE ZERO TWO”
- BIRDOG 020 “BIRDOG ZERO TWENTY”
- BIRDOG 021 “BIRDOG ZERO TWENTY ONE”

- 6.7 Allocated firefighting STO call signs must be displayed on the aircraft in accordance with contract requirements and state or territory agency procedures. Where it is necessary to abbreviate call signs for display on aircraft, the following abbreviations shall be used:

STO Call sign	Abbreviation	Example
FIRESPOッター	FS	FS371
BIRDOG	BDG	BDG271
FIREBIRD	FBD	FBD501
BOMBER	BOM	BOM662
HELITAK	HTK	HTK322
FIRESKAN	FSCAN	FSCAN270

- 6.8 Only currently allocated firefighting STO call signs may be displayed on aircraft. Withdrawn call signs must be immediately removed.

7 Australian Fire Aircraft Monitoring System (AFAMS)

- 7.1 Within AFAMS, STO Call signs form part of the unique identifier used for each aircraft. AFAMS data standards recommended that the AFAMS identifier be composed of the STO Call sign, followed by the aircraft registration and then the Contractor’s name (e.g. HTK567 N123XY FlightCorp). Further information is available in the AFAMS data standards.

