



“ Objective ECM has become **so integral to the FAA’s operations** that senior officers **no longer accept paper to sign** unless it is an exception. ”

Joseph Stablum FAA Information Management Project,  
Navy Fleet Air Arm

**ORGANISATION**

Royal Australian Navy (RAN)  
Fleet Air Arm (FAA)

**INDUSTRY**

Defence

**USERS**

1,100

**SOLUTION**

 **Objective ECM**

**BENEFITS AT A GLANCE**

**Better visibility** to ensure compliance with mandatory safety and airworthiness regulations

**Greater confidence** in making informed decisions

**Analysis of existing processes**

identified areas for operational improvements

**Improved reporting** delivered unprecedented tools for managing staff, projects, and operational resources

**Flexible digital workflows** replaced manual paper processes

**Centralised information** ensured that all operational activities were documented, organised, and preserved

**GREAT GOVERNANCE >>>  
BETTER BUSINESS**

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Fleet Air Arm (FAA) and Objective ECM improve operational visibility and accountability.

Even the most rigorous, procedure-based organisation like the Royal Australian Navy (FAN) Fleet Air Arm (FAA) sometimes faces a challenge that forces it to transform itself. For the FAA, that challenge came in the form of finding a robust information management solution that would deliver full auditability and traceability, enabling confident decision making and adherence to safety and airworthiness regulatory compliance. This system needed to shape and prepare the organisation for a major change in the safety and airworthiness regulations. The level of improvement required was well beyond the former system capabilities. The FAA’s objective was to have an Australia best information management system that met operational outcomes and enabled regulatory compliance confidence.

The requirement for assured compliance confidence, and the awareness of a full new suite of safety and airworthiness regulations around the corner highlighted the need for change to the newly appointed Commander of the Fleet Air Arm, Commodore Chris Smallhorn, who realised after his assuming Command that ponderous processes were perpetuating inefficiencies for the greater than 1100 FAA staff under his command.

Those staff are based at HMAS Albatross, the base which supports the main Naval Air Station (NAS) – the home of the FAA since 1948 – Nowra, NSW. The facility, which covers many square kilometres, is a key site in the Navy’s defence network and includes, among other things, the maintenance of four helicopter squadrons, an unmanned air system unit and a developmental flight test unit.

The introduction of the Defence Aviation Safety Regulation (DASR), a set of aircraft maintenance and training principles that was introduced in 2016 to replace the previous Military Operational and Technical Airworthiness Regulations, created a challenge for the FAA and was key in driving the intent and timeframe of re-designing and replacing its information-management processes which were too informal to provide the detailed reporting and accountability that the Commander considered necessary by contemporary standards.



# KEY BENEFITS



**OBJECTIVE APPROVAL MECHANISM  
BECOMES STANDARD  
SIGNATURE METHOD  
ALLOWING FOR DIGITAL APPROVAL**

Staff across the facility were using personal email accounts as de facto filing systems. While meticulous records were kept, they were usually kept on paper forms whose contents were not easily available to supervisors and operational leaders, albeit most paper documents were scanned and electronically filed.

This created a less than ideal oversight of crucial operational and safety-related activities, such as the ongoing airworthiness of Navy helicopters, for which the FAA group is responsible. It also had implications for the organisation’s ability to comply with ever-stricter documentation and auditing requirements such as the National Archives of Australia’s Digital Continuity Policy 2020.

“In the context of the Navy, and of public service generally, there is a lot of financial information but not a lot of information about what is happening, who is doing what and how and when,” explains Joseph Stablum, project manager for the FAA Information Management Project (IMP).

Given the broad geographical spread of the NAS – where staff can be working in buildings a kilometre apart with no view of each other’s activities – this lack of visibility obstructed processes such as resource allocation, auditability, and strategic planning.

“When you look at an operation like the FAA,” Stablum says, “safety is of prime importance. But you can’t make the right decisions unless you’ve got the right information at your disposal. Commodore Smallhorn wanted a way to ensure that he could know what was happening, have awareness of the tasking that was taking place across the organisation, and importantly be able to assess the effectiveness of organisational performance, in this case through an information management and agility lens.”

## SETTING A NEW OBJECTIVE

As a longtime records-management expert, Stablum was well acquainted with the challenges that come with trying to increase recordkeeping discipline – particularly in organisations where established paper processes provided a comfortable fallback for staff.

For the FAA to get the kind of top-down visibility that it required, Stablum knew that all staff would have to not only be trained to use a formal records-management system, but be encouraged to continue using it on an ongoing basis.

This required fundamental changes to the FAA’s workflow, and a viable alternative system that was powerful and flexible enough to take over the existing processes. It was clear from the start that this system would be Objective ECM, which was available to the FAA through a long-standing bulk-licensing arrangement but had never been actively adopted at an operational level.

“We had to take our existing tool and make it a fundamental tool for the way people do their business,” Stablum explains. “It wasn’t something to do separately or to enter information into afterwards, or doing business by email and trying to file those into the system later.”

This included getting the FAA to run all of its business processes as workflows through Objective, to use a standard structure and standard file links, and to stop locking records down so nobody could see them.

This practice was the equivalent of locking paper records in filing cabinets – but it was limiting the value of electronic document management, which needs to become part of everyday activities instead of just storing files in static repositories. “That’s true information management,” he adds, “but you need rigorous records management in order to achieve it.”

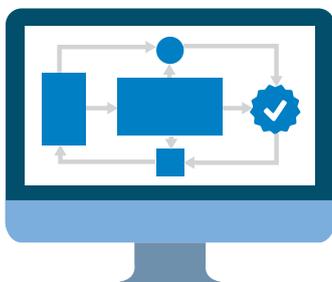
## DIGITISING THE FAA’S CORE WORKFLOW

Getting the IMP up and running required a broad and far-reaching effort to audit the FAA’s many processes, then identify a digitisation strategy that would make the most significant impact on the operation’s organisational efficiency. The migration project began in April 2016, and the two-person implementation team – consisting of Stablum and training and support manager Cherie Gouin – soon had a prioritised list of the best areas to target.

Those areas included travel management tasking – the process by which job requests are aggregated, assigned, and traced to their conclusion – and the management of incoming and outgoing hardcopy and email correspondence. These processes had previously been managed through cumbersome chain-of-custody processes: paper files required additional signatures when they were requested, retrieved, reviewed, and replaced as well as by every person who handled them in the interim.



**4,000  
INDIVIDUAL WORKFLOWS  
CREATED TO REFLECT DAILY  
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES**



**INFORMATION IS MANAGED  
WITH GREATER EFFICIENCY  
SAVING AROUND 10%  
OF PROCESSING TIME**



“  
You can't make  
the right decisions  
unless you've  
got the right  
information at  
your disposal

**Joseph Stablum**  
FAA Information Management Project,  
Navy Fleet Air Arm



Building on his previous experience in similar environments, Stablum was able to quickly design Objective workflows to handle both processes and set about pushing them across the organisation.

These forms immediately offered operational benefits: instead of requiring physical signatures from one person and then another, for example, a Generic eDocument Cover Sheet could be electronically signed in serial or parallel by up to 10 people, from wherever they happened to be at the time. Locating and managing information garnered a 10 percent saving on processing time. Greater volumes of information could be readily processed, with improved visibility of completed, outstanding and overdue tasks.

A Travel Workflow, which mirrors standard Department of Defence travel management processes, and a Task Tracker – which captures individual-to-individual work ‘chatter’ – were also implemented. With these four deliverables in hand, by May the implementation team had begun engaging with staff and actively worked to show them how much more efficiently the new workflows could help them function.

The team started within the FAA headquarters and then progressively moved through its four squadrons and other units. And while many staff were open to hearing about the new project, others – at all levels of the organisation – resisted the change. Staff, Stablum says, “went through all of the stages of grief!”

Getting change-resistant staff to adopt Objective as their first-line tool took time and patience, with the team approaching the rollout as an ongoing effort rather than a one-off training exercise.

“Traditional approaches that give staff a presentation or training course, then let them walk away assuming they will do the right thing, actually don't work,” he explains. “You need to be with them, at their desks, constantly, to make what you're saying stick and become part of their daily routine.”

Trainer Cherie Gouin re-enforced this view stating that “Being at their desks allowed a focus on their own issues and also ensured we applied the workflows to their specific business processes”.

“We had people walking the halls, watching what they were doing and asking ‘why are you doing that this way when there's a better way?’ Without having those staff at people's elbows, you will not succeed.” To the credit of the officers, sailors and public service staff of the FAA understood the advantages, they saw ‘what's in it for them’ and adopted the new processes within months. While this was an IM functional and process change, it was undeniably a cultural change; and when the staff understood the value proposition, some requiring more coaching than others, they were onboard. Over 800 people were trained in a newly designed and implemented system in less than six months – this is impressive by any measure.

## A BETTER WAY TO LEAD

Over time, continuous reinforcement helped increase adoption of the new workflows within the FAA's daily operations. The Objective ECM became the default destination for all manner of communications including email, document exchange, tasking, informal communications and more.

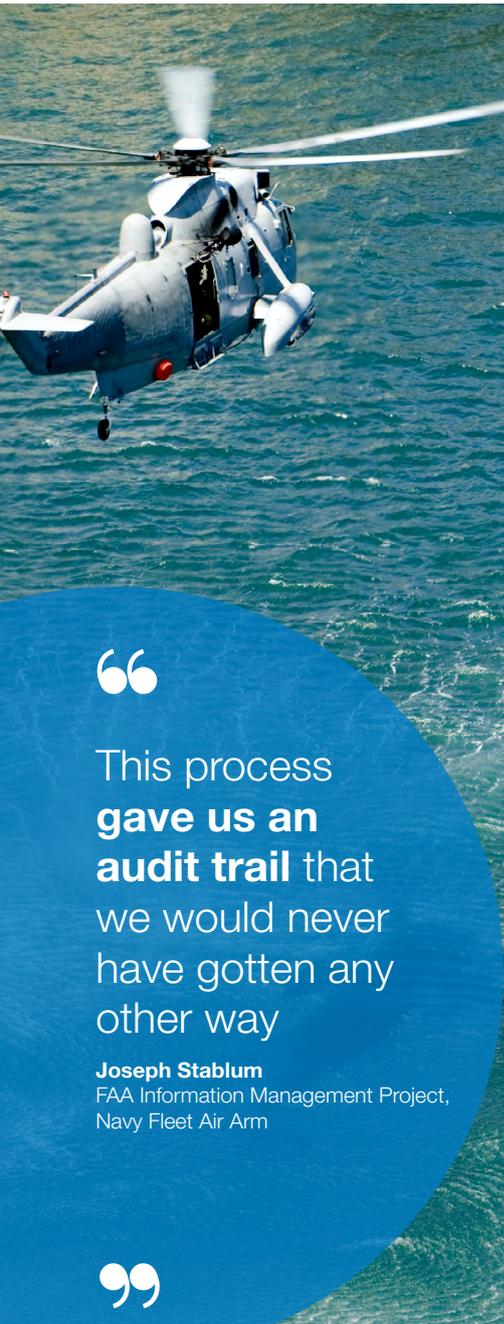
“The more you do that, the more you pick up these processes and the more inventive it becomes,” Stablum said. “And while some of the day-to-day processes are quite small, local-area business processes, by the time you got to the command level they wouldn't even have known that they were happening. This process gave us an audit trail that we would never have gotten any other way.”

The implementation team worked closely with Commodore Smallhorn and his team to develop a reporting regime that would give them an unprecedented view of the operations across the whole of HMAS Albatross.

This included the creation of what Stablum called “rather complex” Objective Find searches within Objective, which surfaced information on the many activities that were going on at any given time. Where further analysis was required, the resulting data sets were exported from Objective ECM into Microsoft Excel for deeper analysis and collaborative planning using sophisticated macros that are locked down to prevent user changes.

Ongoing use of the platform has supported the development of a robust reporting regime in which changes can be easily monitored over time, then actioned as necessary by the leadership team. The Objective Approval mechanism has become the standard signature method – and this system has become so integral to the FAA's operations that senior officers no longer accept paper to sign unless it is an exception.

Throughout the course of 2016 from project commencement, the IMP team developed more than



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FAA Information Management Project,  
Navy Fleet Air Arm

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4000 individual workflows that reflect most of the everyday activities that keep the NAS operating. These have fed an interrogable data set that includes metrics on the volume of administrative work, overdue workflows, trends, and correlation of workload with specific functional areas. With the corner turned into 2017 the new IM system is ‘just how we do work around here’.

Because this data is all stored within Objective, decision-making has been significantly enhanced. “We now know what workload is coming in, and we know what is and is not processed,” Stablum says. “We know what our backlog is, and that enables the commanders to start making those sorts of resource vs workload decisions.”

Better visibility also allows identification of ways to simplify processes by pushing approvals to a lower management level, he adds, “which we could never know before because the commanders didn’t have the metrics to enable them to make those decisions.”

## LESSONS LEARNED

While the Objective ECM technology is well established, applying it to an environment as complex and prescriptive as the FAA proved to be a significant effort that has delivered the desired business improvements for the operation’s managers and the Commander. The project would not have been nearly as successful, however, without following a few guidelines around the implementation of such systems.

First and foremost, Stablum says, is the need for ongoing in-the-field reinforcement of the system’s potential benefits to staff. “As an organisation you have to completely buy into the regime,” he explains. “The only way this worked for us is by having that embedded resource in the area – constantly.”

Similarly, it’s also important to work with staff rather than bludgeoning them with mandates or top-down orders from superiors. “People don’t like change,” Stablum explains. “And there is a reality that you need to be aware of, that people in organisations suffer from change fatigue. Trying to drain the ocean is never going to work: you’ve got to have definable, relatively small goals that are achievable – and you’ve got to know when to stop.”

Also critical to the project’s success was the understanding, from the beginning, that while the IMP leveraged Objective technology it was not a technological solution.

“A technologist coming up with a technological idea for this would never work,” Stablum said. “It has to be a business project and drive real business change. In this case, the issue the FAA had was a business issue and they wanted a business solution. So we did a business implementation – and the awareness and assessment of business information is what leads to the best decisions. Finally, as for any change program, it needs the full drive and support of the leadership, in the case of the FAA it was very much driven by the Command and enabled by experts.”

## ABOUT OBJECTIVE CORPORATION

Objective Corporation (ASX:OCL) creates information and process governance solutions that are effortless to use and enable organisations to confidently advance their own digital transformation.

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