

Introduction:

I live in the suburb of Sunshine which is now affected by aircraft noise from the operation of Melbourne Airport at Tullamarine and, to a lesser extent, Essendon Airport and Point Cook. Increasingly, Avalon as it expands will contribute further noise from additional flights or the diversion of existing flights over my suburb.

At nearly 15k from Melbourne Airport, Sunshine is not immediately next to any airport and, yet, the noise nuisance is severe. Some 35 years ago as a newlywed looking for my first new home, I rejected all suburbs where aircraft noise existed. To my delight when I returned to live in Sunshine in 1980 there WAS NO AIRCRAFT NOISE issue. Low flying planes almost never ventured south of the Maribyrnong River at Avondale Heights.

Things have clearly changed in the last 15 years as there is now a significant and ongoing noise problem over my suburb from aircraft noise. Few flights go directly over my house but the floating noise envelope of those aircraft following a main road 500metres and another 1 kilometre to the east of my home in their approach to land on the north-south runway crackles and breaks the air ominously. On a busy day at the airport, the aircraft noise destroys my quality of life and prevents my use of the backyard let alone opening the windows for ventilation. I feel under siege and on edge for what feels like days at a time.

I must point out that the suburb of Sunshine existed long before the Melbourne Airport was built or its operations began to overfly it. This is no new residential area encroaching immediately onto airport perimeters. It received no overlay plan to make Council mandate acoustic insulation or double glazing in new-builds or renovations. In short, the Airport's business has outgrown its initial operating envelope at the expense of my quality of life without any compensation or sound mitigation being offered.

The failure to build new airports engineered, among other things, to mitigate noise to surrounding residential areas means that the nuisance can only grow as air movements become concentrated at Melbourne Airport.

While the Victorian government is determined to keep Melbourne Airport unrestricted by any curfew, it has announced plans to utilise a former 'green wedge' between the city and regional satellite towns for residential purposes. This 'green wedge' also forms the takeoff corridor towards Melbourne's West and further south, the long range path for arrivals which turn east and then north – over Sunshine. The 'green wedge' also provides a flight path that minimised conflict with residential areas for Avalon airport. Meantime, residents or possibly land bankers are pressuring the Victorian government to change the designated Melbourne airport noise corridors to allow land prices, depressed by noise, to rise. The upshot, if they are successful is the transfer of more air traffic to old, existing suburbs.

I am sure that all members of the committee will be aware of the evidence that links airport noise/emissions to poor health and educational outcomes. The Victorian government is building federally funded social housing in poor suburbs and, will as a consequence, put many, many more citizens in harm's way under the flightpaths. Residents such as I, aggrieved that a for-profit business of operating an airport can cause me so much harm and, yet, I have no voice or entitlement to have that nuisance reduced or to be compensated by installing mitigation measures.

(a) has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with

communities affected by aircraft noise;

I have not been to any meetings or participated in any consultation conducted by the Airservices Australia regarding Melbourne Airport. As a member of a local residents association I heard reports from a resident who was previously involved in consultation. The Councillor who attended meetings on Brimbank Council's behalf failed to represent the community interest but rather, became a conduit for Airservices Australia messages to Council chambers. Despite the Councillors claims, no improvement was experienced during her term.

Unfortunately, Airservices credibility was lost to me when they kept changing the rules about what constituted a 'noise complaint'. Initially we were told to lodge a complaint if the noise affected us, then we were told that one complaint for 20 aircraft noise incidents was treated as one complaint. So we started lodging a complaint for every aircraft noise incident. Then we were told if one person makes 100 complaints that will be treated as one complaint. Residents could not win while Airservices Australia made the rules. The changes in complaint recognition all worked to the benefit of Airservices Australia's performance, never to the recognition of residents' real and ongoing stress at the constant noise nuisance.

In its consultations regarding Melbourne Airport, Airservices Australia decided to exclude the community as a stakeholder in subsequent consultations by dropping any community representative. The local Councillor was retained but failed to make headway on our behalf.

(b) engages with industry and business stakeholders in an open, informed and reasonable way;

I am unable to comment on this aspect except to note that representatives from some industry and business bodies continue to be listed on the consultation panel for Melbourne Airport.

(c) has adequate triggers for public consultation under legislation and whether procedures used by Airservices Australia are compliant with these requirements;

Although the public consultation triggers defined in the act relate to developments within airports, I believe that the unwilling stakeholders in every airport business operation, those residents being flown over, require some legislated voice.

The current inclusion of a process for noise management issues in the airport Master Plan has very indirect enforceable actions. Some might consider this manner of consultation mere window dressing. Certainly, aggrieved residents have only one option and that is to lodge complaints!

(d) is accountable, as a government-owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy;

Airservices Australia has designed a noise management strategy for inclusion in its Master Plan for Melbourne Airport. While the plan seems to have a plethora of statistical collection and must keep a large number of officers very busy in full time employment, I can see little voice for residents in its design.

From a resident's perspective I can see that Airservices Australia controlled all the variables of its noise management policy. They selected the committee participants, they defined a complaints process to receive input, they determined how to 'interpret' complaints to make them count. They determined what action, if any, was made in

response to complaints or requests from community reps or local government representatives that may have filtered up and, finally, they measured their own performance .

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Residents feel no ownership or involvement in a process where Airservices Australia makes the rules by which it is judged and has control.

Airservices Australia has met this criterion is a glory of form over substance.

(e) has pursued and established equitable noise-sharing arrangements in meeting its responsibilities to provide air traffic services and to protect the environment from the effects associated with aircraft for which it is responsible;

Airservices Australia has been slow to adopt a process of 'noise' sharing, but it seems to be getting there.

My first experience with Airservices Australia's complaints line was dismal. From 3:45am one morning aircraft came in very low and very loud at four minute intervals waking me up and preventing me from dropping off to sleep again. As it takes a full four minutes for a plane and its noise envelope to pass by, the noise was nearly continuous. I rang to complain and left a recorded message. I begged that they somehow stop or slow the noise. When an officer rang back she was stridently on the attack over my lack of appreciation for passenger safety and that I had to endure the noise from their business operations because of safety issues and they could not and would not do anything about it. After that, I never again requested a call back from Airservices Australia.

Over the last three years, the noise from aircraft flying overhead has had periods where it is almost continuous for days with a planes every MINUTE lining up on both approaches to the airport that cross over my home. A young child (from the eastern, non-airport side of Melbourne) burst into tears at the noise when visiting. It was like living in a continuous thunderstorm that never ended. When earth tremors hit Melbourne last year, I presumed it was just a particularly loud airplane. Just as well the tremors were not serious or I would have lost precious time blaming an aircraft,

So I began to lodge complaints. Many complaints. At first nothing happened. Then somewhere in early 2009 after I lodged another bucket load of complaints, and others did, too, we got a respite. It went on for a short while. At least the continuity of the noise was broken. We got a few hours in between loud, rumbling, sky-crackling thundercraft. I did not have to raise the volume of the TV or interrupt a conversation because of loud planes, whining and screaming to slow down.

It seemed that although safety was paramount they really could 'share the pain' and make a difference. I think that those planes which still passed over were higher up, moved faster and seemed to begin their descent a bit later than they had a week before.

Every day the north wind blew, every day the west wind blew, every day the city was fogbound or becalmed, every day it rained, Sunshine was a nightmare living in a constant thunderstorm of aircraft noise.

After enduring another escalation in aircraft numbers, I lodged a batch of complaints, all

headed with 'CURFEW FOR TULLAMARINE' and we got another respite. In fact, in August 2009, we had ONE WHOLE WEEK of almost NO noise. And, the wind was blowing from the northwest. In the quiet, I could then hear the traffic on my busy road (and it just seemed to shush quickly past) and the freight trains on the rail line made a bit of noise but were gone far more quickly than a single aircraft. It was bliss.

Based on our experience since August 2009, Airservices Australia has managed to avoid constant noise periods over Sunshine by what I presume is 'sharing' between communities. There have been many instances of one or two loud aircraft in succession but as they were not accompanied by the constant assault we were forced to live under for years, they were 'forgiven'. It is a far from perfect resolution for a suburb which had no aircraft noise problem until about 15 years ago.

Having acknowledged that Airservices Australia is currently effectively sharing the pain, only their good will keeps this situation happening. Currently we seem to be cursed with noisy flights between 12:30am and 2am each morning as well as the usual peak periods. I cannot help wondering if Airservices Australia was toying with us, or, they might say 'experimenting' with us from Sunshine to determine our limits of endurance.

Rather than this voluntary code, I would prefer to see something strong to make them more accountable for minimising harm to each surrounding community.

(f) requires a binding Community Consultation Charter to assist it in consulting fully and openly with communities affected by aircraft noise; and

In the absence of a legislative framework for the acknowledgement of the unpaid, unwitting and unwilling stakeholders in all airport business operations – the residents overflown - I would urge the Senate Committee to recommend that a binding Community Consultation Charter be devised to consult with communities affected by aircraft noise. Communities are rallying at the abuse from aircraft noise, airport operators must engage meaningfully or risk more demands for curfews. Or, raise the airport noise tax to a level commensurate with community harm and feed it back only to those affected communities.

(g) any other related matter.

Airport operators are delivering harm to people by virtue of their operations, and like the mercury used in gold mining or the carbon produced in energy production, it should not be considered a 'free' good. Consideration should be given to raising the airport noise tax and delivering it to those communities directly affected by those operations.

In other jurisdictions, airport operators have had to pay for noise mitigation to be installed in existing private buildings where their operations have expanded, like those at Melbourne airport, Sydney and Brisbane. Aircraft noise is harmful and at some stage residents will begin legal action unless the government steps in to create some balance. An opportunity exists under Climate Change adaptation to instal both thermal and acoustic insulation and double glazing for affected housing, preferably funded by the noise tax.

The Victorian Government's intention to release the city's 'green wedge' for residential development is a significant concern as more people will be placed under the aircraft noise corridors and more people will be affected by this noise. Additionally, the increase of density in poor suburbs near airports as a result of affordable housing projects will put already disadvantaged people into a worse situation. There is a need to ensure that State government's consider their long-term planning strategies before developing new

communities who will be affected by aircraft noise.