

Senate Inquiry: Air Services Management of Aircraft Noise

From:
John Jennison

Introduction:

The writer of this submission lives in Keilor, Victoria, and has done so for over 50 years. So comments and matters put forward do specifically relate to Melbourne Airport and experiences in this area. Though there is no doubt the comments likely apply generally to Air Services across Australia.

Firstly it must be said that we have been living with aircraft noise in Keilor Village for quite some time, however the effect of this noise is becoming more and more intolerable due to increased traffic and lack of aircraft noise management by all concerned.

Community Consultation:

Air Services consultation with the general public around Melbourne Airport is almost non existent and certainly has no impact on reducing or limiting noise to residents.

There is the “noise complaints service”, this was based in Melbourne for Melbourne complaints now it is centralised in Sydney. The result being there is no local knowledge of the area around Melbourne being displayed by operators at Air Services in Sydney. For example Air Services quoting back Essendon Airport runways instead of Melbourne Airport runways. Knowledge has improved but it is still limited. Recently we were told planes when departing runway 16 were turning right before getting to Keilor so why were we complaining. A few propeller craft do turn but all jets must head south past Keilor before turning.

The interpretation of a “complaint” is dubious. One has to say “this is a complaint” for it to be registered as a complaint, otherwise it is an enquiry and not counted. It is not possible with a single call or email to register more than one complaint at a time. For example if six planes make excessive noise between 2300 and 0200 at night this is considered as one complaint unless six separate phone calls are made, even if it is requested to log as individual complaints for each instance of noise. With aircraft noise at night surely Air Services do not expect residents to fully wake up at night and write down the exact time or even to make a phone call to a recording?

Residents have got sick of reporting incidents to Air Services because nothing improves, only gets worse. As night departures to the south have.

After insistence Melbourne Airport introduced a Brimbank Noise Forum, initially on a three months cycle. Residents are not allowed to come to the Melbourne Airport Noise Abatement meeting (NAC). The Brimbank Forum meetings are now very infrequent, or not at all, with the reason being given that Air Services cannot provide a staff member to attend the meeting. Brimbank Council did provide an officer and a Councillor (Brimbank Council was sacked last year and have not yet allocated an administrator to the Forum), Qantas and several staff from Melbourne Airport, along with six to eight residents from various parts of the city all attend. When these meetings were held on a regular basis some improvements resulted, 727's were phased out and aircraft approach from the south altered to fly over factories instead of residential. Now with no Forum meetings scheduled there is no chance to get our message to Air Services.

One of the more frustrating and annoying noise is when departures to the south (16 departures) come very close together. The noise from an aircraft has not subsided before the next departure starts making noise, thus the noise is almost continuous if aircraft separation is too short. If a complaint of this nature is made and a report of departure times requested, a report is provided but with the note to the effect "these might not be the actual departure times". This begs the question, does Air Traffic actually know where the planes are and do Air Services actually have responsible control of the skyways.

As a resident living near Melbourne Airport one believes that Air Services do not want to communicate openly, or even at all about aircraft noise. Recent experience shows that it is getting more difficult and takes longer to obtain information from Air Services.

It appears that from the Minister down "aircraft noise and the community" is a difficult and sensitive topic. Where and whenever possible it should be kept away from. As the Minister has not responded to Brimbank Council or this resident in a meaningful manner it is imperative that this Senate Inquiry take action.

The setting up of an effective Community Consultation Charter is worthwhile but it should be noted that Air Services will claim they do not have the resources to handle the community.

Noise Measurement:

Noise Measurement is a complex science and not easily understood, yet Air Services appear to use this to their advantage and do not simplify explanation for the residents to try and understand. Industry has clear guidelines for noise exposure and is managed by State Authorities but environment noise guidelines are not.

Air Services appear to use this as a way, or as an excuse, to not become too involved in the noise problem around airports. They eventually post information on their website but this requires a specialised knowledge to understand.

After much insistence over a long time from Melbourne NAC, Air Services put a temporary monitor in to Keilor Village (EMU36). This measurement recording over 15 months showed the third highest number of noise events. Bulla has the highest, but fewer residents.

The worry is that Air Services do not want to keep this monitor in place. They put forward vague reasons of proximity to other monitors. As noise is a problem in Keilor Village, than unless it is accurately measured it is impossible to see if improvement or changes made show a decrease in noise. So the monitor should stay.

With the introduction of new models of aircraft there are always claims by the manufactures that the new aircraft will be quieter. When the Boeing 777 came it was claimed to produce a lot less noise yet today it is a noticed as one of the more noisier aircraft. Did Air Services agree or disagree to this manufacturers claim.? This was brought to the attention of Brimbank NAC. So with the introduction of the A380's great promises were made and noise measurements produced, all presumably with Air Services agreement. Now with A380's coming to Melbourne on a regulator basis we notice that they do make less noise but take off at a less steep angle, the result being they are lower as they pass Keilor and so the noise is still extreme. (also refer a later paragraph re A380 and runway16)

Feed Back of Complaints:

One of the major concerns is with the apparent lack of any feed back from the complaints logged. For example if an aircraft does not follow the expected flight path south and may do an early right turn (even towards the 3LO aerial), causing excessive noise over Keilor. We could report this but as far as we know Air Services do not follow through with the aircraft concerned and certainly do not report back to the us any result of the follow up.

Complaint figures are made available to airport and airline operators by Air Services, yet does any result come from this? Do Air Services set KPI's to reduce complaints, if so can they be made public?

Night Noise:

Aircraft noise at night is always a lot more noticeable due to less ambient noise. Yet Air Services do not appear to insist that Air Traffic limit departures on Runway 16 to the south, when ever possible.

To make matters worse for Keilor residents Air Services are going along with the increased traffic into Melbourne and the additional noise from that traffic. It also appears that many of these flights are at night.

Heathrow, one of the busiest airports in the world, operates with a night curfew to limit night noise for nearby residents. Sydney and Adelaide airports operate with curfews why not here? Air Services here appear to promote Melbourne Airport as a night operation, regardless of noise.

Melbourne One Runway Airport:

While Melbourne Airport does have two runways, more and more the north/south is preferred. This runway has been widened for use by the A380 aircraft and so this aircraft must use the north/south runway. Thus arrivals and departures must pass over Keilor Village.

Another common operation is that an aircraft captain can request to use Runway 16 for departure due to operational reason (size, weight and that it is down hill). This obviously has to be acceptable. But what happens is that Air Services do not necessarily change back to the previous runway and flights are continued to be sent over Keilor Village for some time.

If Melbourne Airport's east/west runway was extended as planned, though this is merely no more than an mention in the 10 Year Master Plan, it would ensure 25% less departures to the south. A worthwhile contribution to noise reduction over Keilor that Air Services don't appear to be supporting.

It is considered that Air Services should be insisting that an International Airport such as Melbourne have two fully operational runways. Thereby, ensuring safe practices in all conditions and to help reduce the noise exposure to residential areas.

Community Perception:

Now that airports such as Melbourne are privately operated the community expects Air Services to exercise responsible control over matters of confirming to the various acts covering aviation. Two matters as examples are given where the community feel let down and confused.

A child minding centre was proposed by the Brimbank Anglican Church at its new centre near Keilor Cemetery, this planning was opposed by Melbourne Airport under the Airport Overlay. Too noisy for young children! Soon after this a Child Minding Centre was built on Airport land at Melbourne Airport and there is another at Essendon Airport so where is the justification about noise levels affecting the business of child minding?

New noise profile curves (20, 25, 30, 35) have been published incorporating future runways along with rules for AEO1 and AEO2. One of the profile lines splits a

street in Keilor, meaning either side of the street come under different Airport Overlays. Meaning some residents can build two units on a block where as a neighbour can't do anything.

Both these issues are about aircraft noise yet Air Services are not providing any advice or support in matters of unfairness and inconsistency.

Summary:

It is recognised that aircraft noise and the issues involved are complex and not easily or quickly solved. But that is not an excuse for Air Services, Airport Operators, Airlines and the community to do as little as possible. Its only by commitment by all, and being prepared to work together can any reduction in noise be achieved.

The immediate steps below should be put into place:

- Night curfew for Melbourne Airport.
- Regular Brimbank Noise Forum meetings.
- Air Services to improve noise monitoring, restructure complaint recording and provide feed back to stakeholders.
- Air Services to undertake more research into aircraft noise and weather conditions.
- Air Services to improve noise abatement procedures and enforce aircraft compliance.
- East/west runway at Melbourne Airport extended and widened without further delays.

As a resident it would be pleasing and appreciated if this Senate Inquiry resulted in reducing noise to residents around Australia's Airports and in particular Melbourne Airport.

G John Jennison, CPEng
18th January, 2010