



Australian Mayoral Aviation Council

Submission to
the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Reference Committee's

**Inquiry into the effectiveness of Airservices Australia's
Management of Aircraft Noise**

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Contents

Introduction	1
Committee Terms of Reference	1
Preamble.....	2
(a) Whether Airservices Australia has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with communities affected by aircraft noise	2
(b) Whether Airservices Australia engages with industry and business stakeholders in an open, informed and reasonable way.....	3
(c) Whether Airservices Australia has adequate triggers for public consultation under legislation and whether procedures used by Airservices Australia are compliant with these requirements	3
(d) Whether Airservices Australia is accountable, as a government owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy	4
(e) Whether Airservices Australia 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.....	6
(f) Whether Airservices Australia requires a binding Community Consultation Charter to assist it in consulting fully and openly with communities affected by aircraft noise	6
(g) Any other related matters	6



Australian Mayoral Aviation Council

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Introduction

This submission to the Inquiry is by the Australian Mayoral Aviation Council, (AMAC). AMAC represents the interests of Local Government Councils and their communities from throughout Australia that have airports located within their area or whose communities are impacted by the activities of those airports. Member Councils represent some 3.25 million residents nationally.

Committee Terms of Reference

In undertaking this inquiry, the committee shall consider whether Airservices Australia:

- (a) has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with communities affected by aircraft noise;
- (b) engages with industry and business stakeholders in an open, informed and reasonable way;
- (c) has adequate triggers for public consultation under legislation and whether procedures used by Airservices Australia are compliant with these requirements;
- (d) is accountable, as a government owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy;
- (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;
- (f) requires a binding Community Consultation Charter to assist it in consulting fully and openly with communities affected by aircraft noise; and
- (g) any other related matter.

Preamble

AMAC accepts that the primary focus of Airservices Australia must be on delivering safe and efficient air travel for the benefit and protection of both the travelling public and the general community.

AMAC supports aeronautical development of airports. It accepts the major role airports and aviation play in both the state, national and global context.

AMAC also contends that Airservices Australia has an important role to play in collaborating constructively and transparently with local communities, airport and airline operators in seeking solutions to, or mitigating against, the adverse impacts of aviation activity on surrounding communities. There must be a balance between efficient operations and passenger comfort and the health and harmony of local communities.

(a) Whether Airservices Australia has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with communities affected by aircraft noise

AMAC would argue that, from an historic perspective, this has not been the case. The view of the organisation with regard to communities has, in the past, generally fluctuated between disregard and being “yet another box to be ticked.” The recent fiasco of unilaterally changing flight paths at Perth airport with no consultation, or even advice, is a case in point.

A review of the contents of Airservices web site and Corporate Plan 2010 - 2015, supports the view that the organisation sees its responsibility to the community as very much secondary. Under the organisations Statement of Intent, for example, (at 3)

“Support the Government’s environmental initiatives in relation to climate change and aircraft noise management. This includes the maintenance and appropriate resourcing of the Noise Enquiry Unit.”

Nowhere in the Key Actions or Key Result Areas is there reference to **how** the issue of noise will be managed. Indeed issues concerning the environment are dominated by the important but relatively recent focus on greenhouse emissions. While global warming is an increasing public concern the most significant cause of adverse community reaction to the operation of airports remains aircraft noise.

As for the resourcing of the Noise Enquiry Unit, the focus of this unit and of the organisation generally has been internal with the aim of improved complaints handling rather than on complaint avoidance. Similarly, the recent introduction of WebTrak as a tool available to the public has a focus on the provision of interesting information with no provision for that information to be used to influence behavioural change or provide a mechanism for penalty.

Further, under the Statement of Intent (at 10)

“Actively engage and consult with government, commercial, industrial, consumer and other relevant bodies in a timely manner.”

Under the KRA’s for this point, participation *“in relevant community and industry forums,”* is the only relevant reference or acknowledgement of community.

A balanced, responsive and meaningful approach to dialogue with all stakeholders is critical in arriving at an informed decision.

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

AMAC is not in a position to offer constructive comment on Airservice Australia’s relationship with industry and business stakeholders other than to proffer the view that these parties appear to fair better than communities in reference to the organisations strategic focus and priorities.

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

In Sydney at least, a reinvigorated Sydney Airport Community Forum (SACF) has led to positive outcomes.

In operation for many years, the Forum had become moribund. It was only through the efforts and pressure by the present government in reconstituting SACF and designating members, their roles and a revised reporting regime, that improved and meaningful dialogue has begun to occur.

It would be safe to say that, without a directed reconstitution of SACF, it would have continued to meander aimlessly, fulfilling its targeted destiny of irrelevance.

AMAC supports the formation of similar Forums with a similar composition at other major airports. However the continuing relevance of the Forums agenda, and other appropriate forms of dialogue and consultation need to be captured in legislation rather than relying on the government of the day to provide adequate incentives for the active and meaningful participation of the relevant parties.

The role of the Committee should be determined by either legislation or regulation and not be at the whim of the Minister of the day.

The policy of sharing the noise needs to be reviewed and an impact statement prepared to determine if a noise sharing policy with respite truly adheres to the premise of seriously affecting the least number of residents.

Monitoring committees should also have their outcomes published in the public domain.

(d) Whether Airservices Australia is accountable, as a government owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy

The Committees attention is drawn to comments in (e) below regarding the ongoing failure of the Long Term Operating Plan for Sydney. The Plans targets have never been met and no one appears accountable or capable of rectifying this situation. Similarly, in relation to the changes in flight paths at Perth Airport previously referred to – where is the accountability?

The fact that noise measurement continues to use ANEF/ANEI adds to the lack of clarity, realistic noise assessment and the ability to adequately apportion responsibility. ANEF is a generic Australian metric with Europe using NEF and the United States of America using Ldn and Leq.

ANEF is not, of itself, sufficient to provide a clear practical measure of the real impact of aircraft noise at a particular location. ANEF is a highly technical standard of measure which aggregates/averages aircraft noise. It also produces contours which are imaginary lines on a map suggesting that people or properties on one side of this line are substantially more affected than those situated immediately on the other side of that imaginary line. It does not easily relate to an understandable decibel noise level or level of affectation, nor does it identify the number of aircraft movements or periods/times of impact, or of respite from noise affectation.

In order to measure the impact of single events along with cumulative totals or the number of location specific events per hour (day/night) would require use of a different metric such as N65 and Ta7.

Due to the nebulous nature of ANEF and its inability to provide specific event information, responsibility and accountability can easily be avoided. Further, as a result of reliance on ANEF, sub-optimal land use planning outcomes will continue to be made in relation to land surrounding all Australian airports. As a result there will be a continued escalation in friction between airports and their neighbours particularly when the community is not informed or consulted concerning the changes.

It is imperative that effective and sustainable strategies are developed that will allow airports to operate efficiently while the adverse outcomes from those operations are both adequately quantified and appropriately managed.

Air passenger movements are predicted to double in the next 20 years along with a continued healthy expansion in airfreight services. At the same time the issue of reducing the noise impact of aviation operations is being placed squarely in the technology basket. New technology in airframes and engines, increased capacity of aircraft and new technology and air traffic management procedures will provide the solution, we are told. With these technology predictions and the inability of ANEF to reflect real time impact, government agencies and airport operators can forecast substantial reductions in the ANEF noise contours and a better life for noise effected residents with impunity. The facts suggest otherwise.

The Chapter 3 standard for aircraft was adopted in 1977. Chapter 4 in 2004, yet there are still a limited number of marginally compliant Chapter 3 aircraft operating out of Australian airports. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that, with:-

- the cost of initial aircraft investment,
- greater competition and reduced airline profit margins,
- the economic life of the aircraft fleet with present generation aircraft on order, and yet to be delivered,

that changes in aircraft technology will continue to be incremental. In addition aircraft carrying capacity is dictated by market. While there might be an opportunity for increased capacity aircraft on some international and limited high volume domestic routes, there will continue to be a reliance on more frequent flights of aircraft of existing capacity within many markets.

The result is that, over an extended period of time beyond the predicted rate of increase in flight numbers and frequency, technology should aid in reducing single incident noise emissions. This limited noise reduction will however continue to be far outweighed by event frequency unless a relevant measurable metric or suite of metrics is introduced. The result must be capable of making operators and agencies accountable and be relevant in assisting with adequate land use planning to minimise conflict in areas surrounding airports and under flight paths.

Airservices Australia should produce noise contour maps and not just certify those produced by Airport operators.

(e) Whether Airservices Australia 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

In relation to this point AMAC submits that Airservices Australia has failed in meeting this obligation. A classic example of this is the Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP) for Sydney. The “*share the noise*” strategies enunciated under the Plan have never been met in the 10+ years the Plan has been in place. Either the targets within the Plan must be met or they must be recast with effective measurable standards for which agencies can be held accountable. Failure to ever deliver on the targets under the LTOP for Sydney leads to the conclusion that, rather than being a noise management strategy that is meant to be achieved, it may have become a meaningless strategy and a matter of public expediency.

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

Having regard for the foregoing responses, AMAC contends that Airservices Australia has demonstrated a propensity to treat community consultation as, at best, incidental. In any case a continuing voluntary regime means an ongoing reliance on an agency’s goodwill and the hope that a succession of management will enforce adequate consultation as a key requirement in any change process.

History demonstrates that a voluntary regime of community consultation does not work. Overlooking any obligation, or a propensity to avoid the thornier issues, will continue unless there is compulsory compliance with a suite of procedures that includes compulsory and meaningful community consultation.

The right of legal enforcement of breaches relating to noise, flight paths etc should be available to any person.

(g) Any other related matters

To assist local authorities in responsible land use planning a definitive ultimate capacity noise contour for airports needs to be established and revisited at least bi-annually. Methodology and results need to be then verified and published.

In addition, Airport Masterplans should not be developed, in isolation, by airport operators, for the use and benefit of those operators. Rather they should be developed by government and be subjected to independent assessment. The Masterplan for Sydney is a case in point. That Masterplan is predicated on a substantial increase in flights but with a significantly reduced noise footprint identified. Once again it is in the operators interest to minimise projected impact. Such positive projections are aided and abetted by continued reliance on the ANEF metric and a conclusion that there will be a dramatic acceleration in technology based solutions to the noise issue. It fails to have regard for the fact that relatively minor reductions which might be achieved in single event incidents over an extended period of time due to advances in technology will be more than offset by the projected explosion in the number and frequency of flights.

Furthermore it is not only Airservices Australia who choose to exclude voluntary meaningful dialogue and input from representatives of affected communities. In Perth, for example, Mayor Glenys Godfrey whose city includes Perth Airport, has not been included as a member of that airports Environment Committee. AMAC contends that it should be the right of communities adversely affected by aircraft noise greater than ANEF 25 to have a seat on such Committees in order to represent the community interest.

Finally the proposal in the governments White Paper to appoint an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman is welcomed by AMAC which has been a long standing supporter of such a role. There is however substantial concern with the proposition that the position should be housed within Airservices Australia.

The holder of such an office must not only be able to operate truly independently but must be seen to be doing so. It is AMAC's view that the Ombudsman must be independently positioned and resourced with the capacity to, not only review incident reports and the way they are managed but also allocate responsibility and, where warranted, recommend penalties. The Ombudsman must also be able to monitor the veracity of information supplied and the genuine and transparent nature of the consultation process.
