

## **Response Effectiveness of management of aircraft noise**

**This response will deal specifically with questions c – g of the terms of reference.**

The comments are made as a citizen living within 2.00klms of Darwin International Airport though NOT under the flight path/approaches for either of the two runways.

Much of the comments are contained in the attached response to the consultation on the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) which was due 24 Jan 2009.

Whether Airservices Australia:

**Point C: has adequate triggers for public consultation under legislation and whether procedures used by Airservices Australia are compliant with these requirements:**

The way this and other announcements re consultations is a fitting example of the inadequacy of public consultations. One (only) advertisement was placed in the Northern Territory News for this consultation which also gave an incorrect web address. From recollection the advertisement DID NOT include the terms of reference and did not identify Darwin International Airport (DIA) as one of the airports covered by the inquiry. Without access to the internet, and the capacity to telephone Canberra to obtain the correct internet details it would have been very difficult to make a comment.

Similarly the inquiry was announced early December with a closing date of 29<sup>th</sup> January. Many Darwin residents leave for the Christmas/January holiday period which means they are unlikely to have had the time to prepare a submission, even if they knew about it.

The concurrent consultation re the JSF makes no obvious reference to this enquiry and, coincidentally this enquiry also appears to ignore the existence of the JSF consultation – both of which relate specifically to the impact of aircraft noise on communities. I consider this to be an apt example of the **need for better co-ordination between key stakeholders especially given the existence of the Joint User Deed for DIA.**

**Point D: is accountable, as a government-owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy.**

From my research there appears to be no accountability for noise management where, as in the case of DIA there is a Joint User Deed. The Defence Dept's use of the airport and surrounding areas (RAAF Base) does not appear to require accountability. (see comments in JSF response below). Hence the question: **To what extent does the Airports Act 1995 need amendment to ensure there is accountability by ALL users of the airport?**

**Point 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:

**See above question.**

**Point F: requires a binding Community Consultation Charter to assist it in consulting fully and openly with communities affected by aircraft noise;**

**I support this proposal given the difficulties encountered in having my voice heard as a citizen affected by aircraft noise as outlined in the JSF consultation submission (see below)**

**Point G: any other related matter. See attached response for the JSF consultation for any other matters which may have relevance to this enquiry.**

Pamela Trotman (Ms)

Tony House (Mr).

# Public Environment Report JSF

## Context of these comments:

We have lived at our current address since 30 April 1993. This address is approximately, 1.8km (direct line) from runway 18/36 and much further from runway 11/29. The aircraft noise and activity have only become intrusive in the last few years and relates mostly to planes (military and light aircraft) flying directly overhead.

I am 62 years of age and work as a counsellor/mediator with conflicted families. This work is highly stressful, and often fraught, which means that the maintenance of my own wellbeing is pivotal to my capacity to remain effective. There is much research outlining the dangers and negative impact on individuals, families and whole communities where there are high levels of conflict. That our house is 'blasted' by aircraft noise at all hours of the day and night during peak military exercises is not conducive to the maintenance of that well being. I thus remind the reader that the pilots of fighter aircraft are not the only people working in areas of high conflict. It is also important to note that at any one time my clients are likely to include Defence personnel and their families, or those of Police and Emergency Services.

It should also be noted that my neighbours include magistrates, medical personnel, child protection workers, Police and other counsellors. The magistrate is likely to be on the 'week long on-call roster' for the whole of the Northern Territory which requires the receipt of phone calls and the necessity to make high level legal decisions at any time between 5.00pm and 8.00am. During 2008 I was an After Hours child protection worker. This required me to be in the office from 4.00pm – 11.00 then 'on-call' until 8.00am. Thus high tempo activities during the day prevented me from relaxing before a long and potentially arduous shift in which I was one of only two people with primary responsibility for ALL child protection crisis responses across the Northern Territory.

## Comments:

- 1. Area impacted on by noise from the JSF versus the Darwin International Airport Master Plan and Environment Strategy.** The DIA Master Plan and Environment Strategy, itself the subject of recent consultations, sets out permitted noise levels but only for civil aircraft and other airport related noise. The contours for acceptable maximum noise levels are different for each user group as is the width of the noise contours impacting on the surrounding area. The DIA MP acknowledges the dual airport usage. My enquiries re noise levels have ascertained that responsibility for noise management rests solely with the Darwin International Airport Pty. This suggests that the military usage is not subjected to the same requirement to minimise noise levels on the surrounding civilian community especially during what is referred to in the JSF consultation document as 'high tempo' periods. Whilst I was not able to read the whole document I could not find any reference to predicted noise levels for high tempo activities such as 'initial and pitch'. Reference is ONLY made to low and high tempo periods and their associated activities. Those

activities discussed fully, for example: does ‘an event/activity’ related to one plane flying overhead or a squadron of planes flying over at 1 minute intervals?

Clarification of what constitutes ‘an event’ is of particular concern as during Pitch Black and other exercises held in the Dry Season it is common for jets to fly very low over our house. (See attached photographs taken June 2008). The east - west flight path used on those occasions means that when flying over us the **planes are using maximum power** to climb quickly as part of the ‘Initial and Pitch’ manoeuvres. Such is the intensity of the sound it is impossible to hear anything else, at times our whole house shakes and the child next door **screams** for a long time afterwards. (See below for comments re intrusiveness of noise and effect on physical and emotional well being).

**Question:** what guarantees are there that the civilian population living to the south and west of the airport will not be exposed to planes engaged in the ‘Initial and Pitch’ or similar manoeuvres especially as, at that altitude, the noise levels from the JSF are likely to reach dangerous levels.

**Question:** To what extent does the use of manoeuvres such as ‘Initial and Pitch’ over civilian populations and the resultant increase in noise levels contravene the Airports Act, 1995 (The Act)?

**Question:** What obligations, under the Joint User Deed does the Dept of Defence have to ensure its operations at the DIA, do not expose Darwin citizens to unacceptable, and potentially, dangerous noise levels?

2. I have been advised by personnel from the Control Tower and the Defence Public Relations Hotline that people living north of the DIA are not routinely subjected to extreme noise levels from military aircraft engaged in ‘high tempo’ activities as this is a designated ‘no go area’ for flight clearance purposes.

Whilst I appreciate the need for our fighter pilots to be highly trained, the response thus far to my expressions of concern about flyovers in the Ludmilla/Parap areas has been largely dismissed on the basis that we live in a “less densely populated area” which means that “fewer people are affected by the high tempo manoeuvres”. This suggests a cavalier approach re distressing and potentially damaging noise levels simply because of where we live.

3. I have also been informed that the **reason the northern suburbs are ‘no go areas’ is because of rigorous community protests in the late 80s/early 90s.** This suggests that, where there is a likelihood of major community backlash practices associated with high tempo activities will be tempered in deference to community sentiment. The aforementioned rationale thus raises the question: “what community action is necessary to generate similar deference to residents living south and west of the airport”? I do know that last year when I advised the Defence Public Relations personnel that should my concerns not be respected that I reserved my democratic right to make public protests which could include activities designed to embarrass the Dept of

Defence and the Australian Government with regard to visiting fighter teams. Shortly after that conversation, perhaps coincidentally, there was a marked decline in the number of ‘flyovers’!

3. **Potential effects of noise:** The report mentions (see pages 158) that there are no ‘definitive answers’ re the negative impact of [aircraft] noise. It is interesting to note that a quick internet search for ‘noise as torture’ identified 98,000 hits discussing the negative impact of noise. **What really concerns me about this report and its underlying rationale** is that the authors appear to have ignored or glossed over any research which might identify any evidence against the wisdom of introducing an aircraft such as the SJF to the Darwin skies. Instead they repeatedly point out that even at peak times the anticipated JSF noise levels will ‘only last 1 – 5 minutes. No mention is made of **the psychological effects of being exposed to high levels of noise when one has no control over the time, duration or frequency of that noise** which is the very essence of using noise as torture. (see chart 6.2, page 123)
4. **Noise and closed windows:** Reference is made in page 145 to the impact of noise at L(A)max noise levels with the NA contours displayed in diagrams 6.12, 6.13 and 6.14. The impact is discussed in terms of noise levels ‘outside’, and ‘inside with closed windows’. No recognition is given to the fact that Darwin is a tropical city with many houses having louvred windows which, for the most part, remain open year round. Nor is it acknowledged that metal cladding is used in most of the older Darwin houses which means they are not ‘protected’ from ambient ‘outside noise’ in the same way as for homes built of better bricks or other solid materials.
5. **Shut down time for Defence military activity:** I could not find specific mention of the designated ‘shut down time’ for military activity. For many years the shut down time has been advertised as 10.30pm. In 2008, when I protested because of activity just before 11.00pm I was advised by a Defence officer with whom I spoke that ‘we can operate’ until 11.00pm if we choose’. It thus appears that there is no credibility in the advertised shut down times, or for that matter the ‘start up times’ – on some occasions to be 6.30 – 7.00am on a Sunday morning!
6. **Reference to low and high tempo activity:** Nothing I read related to ancillary flight activity to that of the normal approach and take-off routes. References appear to only pertain to the likely increase in noise levels when using those direct approaches to main runway (11/29). **The noise levels over the Ludmilla/Parap/Fannie Bay area will greatly increase should the ‘high tempo’ activity also include the practice of “Initial and Pitch” and other low flying exercises.**

#### **Other comments:**

- **Data:** The report indicates that 80 calls were made to the Defence Public Relations line with respect to the 2009 Pitch Black training exercises. Of those 80 contacts only 6 are recorded as expressing concerns by community members. I refute this as I would have made at least that number myself across the duration of the exercise. It thus suggests that the ACTUAL calls

were not recorded, only the number of people who expressed concerns. There also appears to be no reference to the number of calls made to the DIA Control Tower to lodge complaints re aircraft noise. I personally made a number of calls to the Control Tower before being referred to the Defence Public Relations hotline.

- **Use of Tindal for exercises such as ‘Initial and Pitch’:** Given that it is important for pilots to practice flying their aircraft at high speeds and low altitudes one would assume that exercises such as ‘Initial and Pitch’ could be conducted at Tindal Air Base which is less likely to disrupt the Katherine civilian population as the base is located outside the Katherine town area.
- **Basis of former complaints to Defence:** ALL but one of my complaints to the Defence Public Relations Hotline in the last 2 years have related solely to complaints about **RAAF jets flying directly over our home at very low altitudes** (see attached photograph). In July 2008, such was the level of stress and distress caused by this and other strong aircraft noise I had every intention of resorting to direct action by breaking onto the Base and lying in front of the aircraft as they taxied back to their staging area. The Base Security log will have a record of this because when I could not get access to the Base I demanded to speak with Security. When I raised my concerns again last year (2009) I reminded the Defence Public Relations section of my intention to cause embarrassment should those controlling the flight activity of Defence aircraft not demonstrate respect for us (citizens living to the south and west of the airport) in the same way as they do for those citizens who live north of the airport (no flyover zone).

Pamela Trotman (Ms)

Tony House (Mr)

**Photographs of Aircraft Flyovers – up to 6 planes @ one minute intervals and repeated shortly afterwards.**



