

Effectiveness of Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise

I am a 58-year-old professional person living in the suburb of High Wycombe in the foothills of Perth. I have lived there for three and a half years. For the first two and a half years I had no aircraft noise issues. The last year has been absolutely dreadful with respect to aircraft noise.

I am very well informed as I read the daily newspapers and all the local papers. I was completely taken by surprise by the sudden onslaught of aircraft noise. There does not appear to have been any widespread consultation or provision of information to the general public on the issue of changing flight paths and the consequent dramatic increase of aircraft noise.

I have kept a log of aircraft noise since May last year. The noise of aircraft taking off is so loud it is impossible to sleep through. The noise often begins before 5.30 am and reoccurs every few minutes as aircraft scream overhead during takeoff. Even on weekends this is a problem so catching up on sleep then is not an option. Being constantly woken up so early has frequently resulted in sleep deprivation and consequent impaired performance at work. At other times it merely results in seriously increased stress at being subjected to the intrusion of noise in my own home and being powerless to do anything about it. When someone has to have a pair of earplugs next to their bed in an effort to get some sleep, then they have a serious problem that is likely to impinge on their health, safety and general wellbeing.

Airservices Australia's justification for the changed flight paths appears to be linked to changes for safety reasons. However, the noise pattern is so variable that I am at a loss to understand this reasoning. Sometimes the aircraft noise is non-existent for days (or in one case for about 6 weeks in Sept/Oct 2009) and then it returns with a vengeance for weeks at a time. If the issue is safety, what are they doing with the aircraft during the periods when there is no noise???

On a more practical level, the issue of aircraft noise has made my suburb a much less desirable one to live in and as a consequence has had a negative impact on house values. In summary, I would say that Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise has been so poor as to be non-existent. As an organization they take a very Nazi-like approach to the general public with their attitude of "we can do what we like and you will just have to like it or lump it". There does not seem to be any concern or even interest in the results of the restructuring of flight paths and the consequent very negative impact on people's wellbeing. Airservices Australia comes across as a very Teflon-coated organization that has carte blanche to do what they like with no public accountability. If this situation continues I would lobby strongly for an airport curfew so that at least those affected by the noise issues can get some decent sleep.

In closing, I would hope that the end result of the Senate inquiry is not just a slap on the wrist that does nothing to help those of us affected by this problem. I would hope that the inquiry has some "teeth" and can help resolve or ameliorate the issues that I have raised.