

Submission to Senate Standing Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of Air Services Australia's management of Airport Noise **29/1/2010**

A. Response to Terms of Reference:

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

(a) has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with communities affected by aircraft noise; **While ASA officers attend MACCC meetings, as far as I know they have never conducted any such a consultation strategy with the broader communities.**

(b) engages with industry and business stakeholders in an open, informed and reasonable way; **Proceedings of MACC indicate that ASA staff probably do engage with industry stakeholders in a reasonable way but as they continue to insist they can do nothing about airport noise, this does not get anything done about it.**

(c) has adequate triggers for public consultation under legislation and whether procedures used by Airservices Australia are compliant with these requirements; **I am not sure about what triggers may exist, but they do not appear to be working.**

(d) is accountable, as a government-owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy; **I was not aware ASA had a noise management strategy, nor that it was in any way accountable to the public.**

(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; **Not as far as I am aware.**

(f) requires a binding Community Consultation Charter to assist it in consulting fully and openly with communities affected by aircraft noise; **Yes: a binding community consultation charter would be a useful means to encourage ASA to improve its management of airport noise. I might also lead to opportunities for ASA to listen to and consider recommendations put up by the community or airport users to better manage this problem.**

(g) any other related matter. **Please see below.**

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B. Recent history of airport noise nuisance at Moorabbin and of ASA failure to take any action to ameliorate or solve the problem.

As an elected councillor with the City of Kingston for the ward that includes Moorabbin Airport since 2003, and as a Council representative on the Moorabbin Airport Community Consultation Committee in all that time I am closely acquainted with the serious noise problems generally caused by low-flying planes over residential suburbs surrounding the airport including Cheltenham, Mentone, Parkdale, Mordialloc and Dingley Village.

In all that time despite strenuous efforts by local resident groups represented on MACC, there has been little or no improvement, and the airport's lessee Moorabbin Airport Corporation has at all times been pessimistic about doing more than the voluntary Fly Friendly Program which they initiated in 2003-4 and which relies on appeals to pilots upon take off to the south to maintain their course straight over the Woodlands Golf Course and not turn until they reach White Street, by which time they have usually reached 500 feet altitude. (I am not sure whether ASA was involved in the development of Fly Friendly, but in any case, it has not achieved its goal.)

While some pilots may comply with this request, those who do not create a significant continuing noise nuisance for the residential areas and secondary school underneath their flight path. One meeting was attended by the Principal of the Parkdale Secondary College who told in quite moving terms how his students had their efforts to complete their VCE examinations hampered and disrupted by low-flying aircraft. (This prompted a helicopter pilot school manager at the meeting to say he would see that his students did not overfly the school any more. I am not sure whether this has actually solved the school's problems or whether they have given up trying.)

In all this time I can honestly say that this Inquiry is the first time I have heard any suggestion that ASA has any role at all in the management of airport noise. In fact, the ASA representatives who attend the MACCC meetings have consistently insisted that they are solely concerned with safety and that they have no responsibility for managing airport noise.

One partial exception to this came in response to a question I put to an ASA manager, Mr Greg Russell, director of Air Services Australia, who addressed the 2007 Australian Mayoral Aviation Conference at which I was representing the City of Kingston. I explained that while we supported the Fly Friendly program, it had failed to adequately control the noise problem & said that we accepted that safety had to be the first priority for ASA control tower staff. However I asked whether, at times when they were not entirely occupied with safety matters, the ASA staff could keep an eye on where the planes were going and could speak to pilots who did not comply with Fly Friendly requirements.

In response, Mr Russell said the ASA staff in the control tower should be able to encourage pilots to comply with the Fly Friendly provisions and promised to meet with me and other councillors and officer when he was next in Melbourne to talk about what can be done. However Mr Russell never contacted me and this meeting

never took place, even though I phoned him once when I heard he was in Melbourne as a gentle reminder.

On another occasion at a MACCC meeting, a pilot referred to “not being able to fly over Ayers Rock.” I inquired about controls over the Ayers Rock air space and consequently we had a report on the “Fly Neighbourly” agreements which are struck between airport operators, pilots and (I am not sure, perhaps communities) at tourist sites including Ayers Rock, but we were told this was not possible for an urban airport like ours.

During a presentation to the 2009 AMAC conference at Coolumb, by the manager of the Council-owned Sunshine Coast Airport told us about a “Fly Neighbourly” agreement in operation there, but when I reported on this to the following MACCC meeting, the MAC manager Phil McConnell said this was the same as our Fly Friendly system.

I am aware of the 1800 complaints number run by ASA that people can ring with noise complaints, and am aware that some people have done so, but I have not heard of anyone who has had any positive results or feedback from such calls and I don’t know of anyone who thinks that such a call will get anything done to prevent or ameliorate this recurrent problem. At Moorabbin, members of MACCC prefer to ring the airport manager Mr Phil McConnell, who will explain the cause of the noise if he can & may try to get something done if he deems it necessary.

As shown by the recent history outlined above, despite making some attempt via the voluntary Fly Friendly program, Moorabbin Airport Corporation and the MACCC have been generally ineffective in dealing with the problem of the impact of aircraft noise on residents.

C. What can be done?

Kingston Council and, as ward councillor, I strongly support having an airport operating at Moorabbin, hence we do not support closing the airport. We are, however, critical of aspects of MAC’s management with regard to the lack of concern for the surrounding residents and community manifest in the overdevelopment of the airport and lack of concern about the impact of airport noise and of industrial traffic on surrounding areas.

We have advocated for the regulation of the GAAP airports to protect surrounding communities from unnecessary noise nuisance, via the regulation of flight paths. We would like to see the control towers given the powers and responsibility to tell pilots to comply with guidelines such as the current Fly Friendly provisions. We accept this needs to be secondary to their primary safety role

Those residents who do support the airport’s closure are generally motivated by concerns about airport noise and safety.

I am also frequently in discussion with pilots and try to represent their concerns as well, as their place as airport tenants makes it difficult for them to express concerns about MAC’s operation. Some pilots are sympathetic to the concerns of residents

whose houses are regularly overflowed, while others believe the problem cannot be solved.

For instance, one pilot on the MACCC told the meeting of rigorous controls on movements around the small country airports like Coldstream, which had been developed in response to complaints by farmers about the impact of aircraft noise on livestock.

I have commented that it seems odd that more care is taken to protect the sheep at Coldstream from airport noise than is taken to protect the citizens of Kingston. Also that there are effective measures to prevent pilots from overflying Uluru but not to stop them flying low over Mordialloc, Parkdale, Cheltenham and Dingley Village.

Several suggestions that have been made seem to me to be worth pursuing either separately or in combination in an effort to better manage the issue of airport noise. If an effective solution could be implemented, this would most likely to reduce calls by residents for the airport's closure.

1. A Fly Neighbourly agreement has been supported by Moorabbin Airport Residents' Association and supported by me and other residents as a possible means of obtaining more commitment by pilots to observe the present Fly Friendly guidelines.
2. ASA airport control tower staff should be required – subject to giving priority to safety matters – to watch where planes go and to issue warnings to those who breach the Fly Friendly/Neighbourly guidelines.
3. A regulatory regime could be introduced, either via a Fly Neighbourly Agreement or some other means that would allow penalties to be imposed on pilots who ignore warnings and repeatedly or wantonly breach the guidelines. Such penalties could include fines or bans of varying durations and could equally be applied to pilots who fly dangerously and cause risk to themselves or others.
4. Training circuits at Moorabbin Airport could be changed to avoid the noise problems caused by repeated and low-flying aircraft flying over residential areas almost incessantly. The Kingston Planning Scheme has protected the Moorabbin Airport flight paths by maintaining green wedge or industrial areas on three sides of the airport. Currently the two training circuits take planes over Cheltenham to the wetlands and over Dingley Village to the east.

In my view, the western circuit should be closed except for urgent or non-training purposes and the eastern circuit redesigned to take the planes over the freeway reservation in the green wedge instead of Dingley Village.

Such measures would go a long way towards eliminating the safety risks as well as the noise nuisance caused by the training flights.

5. Victoria's new Hoon Laws could be applied by control tower staff to dangerous or inconsiderate pilots as they are to drivers of cars, motor bikes, boats and jet skis.

6. Noise assessments need to be carried out at GAAP airports where residents are reporting problems, as they are at other airports.

I would be happy to present in person to the committee if that would assist you. As the notes on the webpage do not provide an email address and as the directions for lodging on-line have not worked (I have not been sent a registration code). I am asking one of the other local submitters to submit this for me in case the “seniorclerk” address is not successful.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rosemary West', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rosemary West
Councillor, Central ward
City of Kingston