

# **Submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee**

## **Management of Aircraft Noise by Airservices Australia**

Submitted by Dr Alan Lonsdale and Mrs Rosemary Lonsdale

### **Summary**

This submission is concerned specifically with changes to Perth Airport flight paths made by Airservices Australia in November 2008. Based on the impact of these changes on the amenity of our property and our interactions with Airservices Australia, the submission demonstrates that:

- (a) through the massive increase in aircraft noise imposed on residents who live along the new flight paths, the changes have had a major, negative environmental and social impact,
- (b) in making the changes, Airservices Australia did not pursue equitable noise-sharing arrangements,
- (c) in making the changes, Airservices Australia did not in any way consult with affected communities, and did not provide any information about the intended changes, and
- (d) while representatives of Airservices Australia responded promptly and courteously to aircraft noise complaints and provided helpful information, they also offered false hope about possible revisions to the new flight paths.

We strongly support the requirement of a binding Community Consultation Charter for Airservices Australia.

### ***1) The effectiveness of Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise; impact on the environment; absence of equitable noise-sharing arrangements***

#### ***Environmental impact (Term of reference 1)***

We live in Bickley, an outer-metropolitan suburb in the Perth Hills, approximately 25 km ESE from the Perth CBD and approximately 15 km SE from Perth Airport. A small residential community, Bickley has extensive orchards, state forest and national parks. Until recently, the area has been quiet and peaceful (visitors described it as "tranquil"), and this was an important factor in our decision 23 years ago to live here.

Until late 2008 we had experienced a relatively small number of aircraft movements each day (perhaps 5-6 large aircraft and a similar number of smaller commercial aircraft). Most of these were in the general vicinity and did not pass directly over our house.

Since early 2009, the number of aircraft ***passing directly over our house*** has increased massively, by a factor of about ***700 percent*** on some days. For example, on Monday 25 May 2009, over the 12 hour period from 9.30 am to 9.30 pm, a total of 64 aircraft passed directly over our house. The total for a full 24 hour period would be in excess of 80 aircraft movements.

These aircraft pass directly over or very close to our house. Most are at low altitudes, at times with a frequency greater than one every three minutes. At night, around the period 6.30 pm to

8.30 pm, it is often the case that as one aircraft passes over our house, the lights of two further approaching aircraft are visible to the north.

We have used Airservices Australia's Webtrak site to monitor aircraft movements, and the Bureau of Meteorology's website to ascertain wind directions at Perth Airport at different times. Our review shows that:

- a) The problem applies particularly to aircraft approaching from a northerly direction.
- b) The problem occurs mainly, but not always, when winds at Perth Airport are broadly from the north or east.
- c) Irrespective of the precise direction of approach (ie whether from the north east, or north, or north west), *virtually all aircraft adopt a course that takes them directly over our property in Bickley*, before then swinging to the west and landing from the south. Residents two km west and two km east of our property have not experienced the same problem.
- d) Aircraft altitude varies considerably, from around 1000 m to greater than 2000 m; larger aircraft (eg Airbus 330, Boeing 767) are often low and very noisy.

We are heartbroken, as we feel that we are often enveloped in a rolling avalanche of sound over which we have no control, which is certainly affecting our quality of life.

#### ***Equitable noise-sharing arrangements (Term of reference 2e)***

Visitors to our home who live in other parts of the Perth metropolitan area and are accustomed to aircraft overhead are aghast when they stand in our garden and observe our problem.

They are incredulous when we demonstrate, using Webtrack, the precise way in which our house is being subjected to aircraft that fly *directly* overhead. They cannot understand why flights should be so concentrated that the burden falls heavily on the relatively small number of residents who are unlucky enough to live directly under the new flight paths; flight paths that are followed accurately by aircraft.

In correspondence from Minister Albanese to Hon Judi Moylen MP, Minister for Pearce dated 16 June 2009, the Minister stated that following a review of aircraft routes, changes were made in November 2008, and that "one such change established a new flight path over the Perth Hills area for aircraft arriving from the north to land on Runways 03 and 06. Most of this flight is over national park and farmland, however several small residential communities including Bickley and Glen Forest are now overflowed in a structured manner and more frequently." We assume that the Minister's letter was prepared by, or based on advice provided by, Airservices Australia.

Based on our experience as outlined above, "more frequently" was certainly a substantial understatement.

The manner in which "small residential communities" are referred to implies that such small communities are unimportant and that it is legitimate to impose greatly increased noise disturbance on them. Why should we suffer because we live in a small residential community?

We assume that "in a structured manner" means that all aircraft follow the same path when they pass over Bickley. This is certainly our observation. Our study of flight movements using Webtrak shows that virtually all aircraft approaching from the north are *directed to a point that coincides with our property*, before then taking varying routes as they prepare to land. It is as if our house is their beacon. As a consequence *our specific property is affected by virtually all*

*flights from the north that pass over the Perth Hills*, while other residents are subjected to *some of the flights*. It seems that we are in a particularly unfortunate position.

An Airservices Australia representative confirmed that it is the case that aircraft are directed to overfly a specific point as they approach from the north. Analysis using the Perth Standard Arrival Route Julem Two Arrival chart and Google Earth shows that aircraft track from GUNGN to WUNGO on a path that takes them directly over our house. Modern navigational aids mean that all aircraft accurately follow this narrowly defined route.

## **2. *Community consultation (Term of reference 2)***

### ***Consultation process***

- (a) To our knowledge, Airservices Australia did not consult in any way with communities affected by aircraft noise. As directly affected residents, we received no advice about the intended changes.
- (b) In response to our enquiries, Airservices Australia representatives advised that the Perth Airport Noise Management Consultative Committee was the mechanism for community consultation, and recommended that we seek the assistance of the nominee of the Shire of Kalamunda, our local shire. It is clear that while that person regarded himself as a representative of the Shire, he did not see that it was his responsibility to also serve as a representative of affected – or potentially affected – residents. Such a responsibility was simply not feasible, and for Airservices Australia to suggest that the Shire nominee’s membership was the mechanism for community consultation was misleading and duplicitous.
- (c) The Shire’s nominee reported to us that, in his view, the Consultative Committee was ineffective as timely and adequate information was not provided to the Committee by Airservices Australia. The Hon Judi Moylan was a member of the Committee and had worked very hard to represent the interests of constituents; in August 2009 she resigned from the Committee as vital information was not provided to the Committee and she formed the view that Airservices Australia would not consider revising the recently implemented flight path changes.<sup>1</sup> Our perception is that Airservices Australia adopted a cynical and evasive approach to the functioning of the Consultative Committee. The Committee was certainly *not* a mechanism for community consultation.
- (d) We note that one of the Committee's terms of reference is to "inform existing and prospective owners of properties of aircraft noise impacts". We are directly affected property owners but have received no information from the Committee or from Airservices Australia.

### ***Airservices Australia’s complaints mechanism***

- (a) In response to complaints lodged through the website or by email, Airservices Australia representatives were courteous and helpful in providing information; one gained the initial impression that someone was listening and that something might happen – especially when told that “changes such as these take time, so please be patient”.
- (b) Airservices Australia representatives advised us (i) that as a result of the number of complaints, the November 2008 changes to flight paths were being reviewed, with a

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Hon Judi Moylan, 27 August 2009

- view to reducing the problems, and (ii) that any changes would take some time (months?) as considerable administrative changes would be required.
- (c) It is now apparent that, in fact, no changes were contemplated by Airservices Australia. After lodging several complaints we came to the conclusion that the aim of the community relations section of Airservices Australia was simply to pacify complainants and that action was highly unlikely. The process was a sham.
  - (d) From discussions with Airservices Australia representatives we now understand that the nature of Airservices Australia's reporting system is such that complaints are aggregated statistically, but the specific details of a problem, or constructive suggestions, are not reported to decision makers.
  - (e) In an attempt to make progress we lodged a detailed, formal complaint by email on 8 July 2009. Among other things we requested Airservices Australia to modify the flight paths so that flights were dispersed in an east-west direction as they pass over the Bickley area, rather than being concentrated along a narrowly defined path, in order to spread the noise impact more equitably. We also suggested that the flight path be moved 3-5 km to the east, where the impact on residential communities would be greatly reduced, and sought answers to questions about the operation of the Perth Airport Noise Management Consultative Committee. That email was acknowledged on 9 July with the advice that the letter "will now be forwarded on to the appropriate person for further consideration." We sought information about who the appropriate person would be; the response was: "I passed on your complaint to Airservices to my Manager who has forwarded it on to our Government Relations section. I'm unable to provide the name of the specific individual who will handle the matter."

We received no reply.

### ***Letter to Minister***

As it was obvious that progress would not be made through representations to Airservices Australia, on 2 June 2009 a detailed letter was sent to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development. No response was received.

### **Conclusion**

From our experience, through unannounced changes to flight paths, a failure to consider the social and environmental impacts of flight changes, a failure to consult with or inform affected communities, and the questionable operation of its community and government relations section, Airservices Australia has shown itself to be arrogant and high-handed.

We ask that the Committee:

- (a) urges Airservices Australia to review the flight changes introduced in November 2008 and, in so doing, take proper account of community concerns,
- (b) urges Airservices Australia to introduce responsible procedures for informing and consulting communities affected by aircraft noise, and
- (c) recommends the requirement of a binding Community Consultation Charter to ensure that Airservices Australia is more open and accountable in its dealings with communities affected by aircraft noise.