SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AIRSERVICES AUSTRALIA'S MANAGEMENT OF AIRCRAFT NOISE

1. INTRODUCTION

Air travel is integral to the success of the Australian economy and has become an important part of modern life; for business or pleasure, more people are flying more frequently than ever before. More flights mean busier skies, so how airspace is used and managed is a matter of great responsibility. Improving the passage of aircraft through our airspace ensures safety and keeps aircraft flowing efficiently - and the more efficient it can be made, the more scope there will be to reduce its impact on the environment.

Airservices Australia (Airservices) is a Commonwealth Statutory Authority, established by the *Air Services Act 1995*. Airservices' role is to provide air navigation and aviation rescue and fire fighting services, subject to regulation by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), and independent investigation by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB).

Airservices is required, as far as is practicable, to minimise the effects of aircraft operations on the environment (including noise impacts), promote and foster civil aviation and comply with Australia's international aviation obligations. However section 9(1) of the Act is clear about the paramount importance of safety and states that "in exercising its powers and performing its functions, Airservices must regard the safety of air navigation as the most important consideration".

1.1 EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF AIRCRAFT NOISE IN CONTEXT

Aircraft noise is an unavoidable by-product of aviation activity and will inevitably impact communities surrounding an airport. As aviation activity continues to grow at Australia's major airports to meet the needs of the community and economy as a whole, there is an ongoing challenge to implement technology and procedures to lessen the noise impacts of aircraft.

An example is the impact the Western Australia resource boom has had on Perth Airport. The scale of domestic aviation growth is shown by passenger numbers, which have nearly doubled from 5.1 million in 2002 to 9.2 million in 2008. In 2004, Perth Airport's Master Plan forecast that passenger numbers would reach 8.9 million in 2015. This demonstrates how quickly and unpredictably the industry can vary.

While actual noise levels of individual aircraft movements can be objectively measured, the impact of aircraft noise on communities cannot. The debate on acceptable aircraft noise levels within a community is subjective and often emotive, and tends to relate to individual experiences, expectations and aircraft noise tolerance levels.

The effective management of aircraft noise is a partnership between:

- aircraft operators who generate the noise;
- airport operators whose location broadly determines which communities will be potentially impacted by aircraft noise;

- Airservices which, with prime regard to the safety of aircraft operations, designs and implements the flight corridors to be operated by aircraft arriving and departing an airport; and
- Government who on behalf of the community must balance the impact of airport operations on the community with the need to provide the critical infrastructure required to facilitate social and economic growth at a regional and national level.

Airservices role in the partnership is considerable. As the nation's air traffic control provider, Airservices is responsible for managing the safe and efficient passage of aircraft in a region covering 11 per cent of the world's surface from two major centres in Melbourne and Brisbane and locally at 26 towers at international and regional airports across the country.

Every minute of every day, Airservices utilises its nation-wide communication, surveillance and navigation infrastructure to ensure the national airways system operates safely and efficiently.

As aviation grows and new fuel and emissions saving technologies present new opportunities and new complexities, the need to ensure that communities around airports are appropriately consulted becomes increasingly important. This is well understood by Airservices and improving consultation processes are also a key focus of the Governments' Aviation White Paper released in December 2009.

Airservices is committed to continuous engagement and coordination with the diverse range of stakeholders that are linked by aviation in this country. Airservices will continue to invest in new technologies and infrastructure to continually improve our role in the partnership.

1.2 AIRSERVICES AND AIRPORTS

The location of an established airport within a community and the configuration of its runways are clearly fixed. Airport runway configurations largely determine flight corridor design in the vicinity (around four to ten nautical miles) of the runway ends where aircraft require some distance to safely align with the runway heading.

Where practical, Airservices designs flight path corridors to maximise movements over areas of low population density, such as industrial estates, parkland (including green field sites) and water, or areas of high ambient noise such as major arterial roads. In more complex situations, Airservices works with Government, industry and the community to design and operate flight path corridors that effectively share aircraft noise around the community by alternating the use of corridors and enabling each section of the affected community to gain some respite from aircraft noise during airport operations.

This initiative is best illustrated by the establishment of the Sydney Airport Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP) in 1996/97. However, even though these options may be considered an effective approach to the management of aircraft noise by the broader community, they do not receive universal support and can continue to attract criticism.

1.3 AIRSERVICES AND AIRLINES

While established airport locations are fixed, improvements in aircraft avionics, pilot training and air traffic management technology and procedures increasingly provides Airservices and airlines with more scope in the effective management of aircraft noise. Modern aircraft are

often quieter than equivalently sized older fleet aircraft and many airlines are progressively adopting avionics (and training crews) that enable their aircraft to operate more noise effective air traffic control procedures which can reduce noise impacts.

The mix, density and scheduling of aircraft operations are factors in the generation of aircraft noise controlled by the operators. Often aircraft noise complaints are associated with the time of day aircraft are scheduled to fly. For example, in Western Australia it is likely that airlines' customers in the mining business require aircraft to depart early in the morning to align with shift changes for fly-in/fly-out operations.

1.4 BALANCING ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Airservices' function remains primarily to safely separate aircraft as they present to the air traffic controller. Consistent with the *Air Services Act 1995,* Airservices seeks to perform its function in a manner that ensures, as far as it is practical, the environment is protected from the impact of aircraft operations.

The two major environmental issues with the operation of aircraft are greenhouse gas emissions and noise. In recent times, improvements in technology have enabled Airservices, in cooperation with airlines, to develop and introduce procedures that enable aircraft to more accurately track to and from an airport. While these initiatives may offer overall safety, efficiency and environmental benefits e.g. tracking aircraft away from high-density residential areas and thus maximise the reduction in aircraft noise to the majority of people, even this measure may concern those directly under the more accurate flight path being provided.

1.5 AIRSERVICES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Achieving consensus among diverse groups of individuals on an appropriate balance between aircraft noise, aircraft emissions and economic contribution is at best very difficult, however effective consultation processes provide communities with a better understanding of how the industry operates at neighbouring airports.

Airservices has a comprehensive framework in place to ensure that communities affected by aircraft noise have broad access to information about aircraft operations.

Specific tools such as the Noise and Flight Path Monitoring System (NFPMS), WebTrak and the Airservices website provide direct access for communities seeking detailed information, and the Noise Enquiry Unit acts as a key interface for the public to record noise complaints.

Airservices is an active participant in community consultative forums and airport aircraft noise abatement committees across Australia and has recently developed more detailed community consultation processes which we believe will further engage the community.

Airservices' recent experience with the implementation of the Western Australian Route Review Project (WARRP) highlights that there are occasions when more consultation is required. Now some two and a half years in development and the subject of regular updates to the Perth Airport Aircraft Noise Management Consultative Committee, the communities impacted by WARRP continue to express dissatisfaction with the outcome. Wider dissemination of information relating to the membership of the committee and the outcomes of the discussions would improve community engagement.

The aviation industry is dependent upon building relationships with communities that lead to aviation environmental impacts being managed in a way that is perceived by the public to be fair and equitable. Airservices continuously seeks to improve consultation as the most effective means of better informing the community of change.

Airservices has recently developed a tailored consultative process to be applied when introducing new technologies or procedures to allow communities to better understand and balance the broader environmental benefits relating to greenhouse gas emissions and noise.

In 2010 Airservices will work with Government to establish an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman to independently review noise complaint handling procedures and to improve consultation arrangements. Airservices will also continue to work with airports and other stakeholders to implement other White Paper initiatives relating to noise management and community consultation.

Key points:

- The primacy of safety is Airservices' legislated obligation.
- The effective management of aircraft noise must be a partnership requiring contributions from Government, airlines, airports and Airservices to be fully effective.
- The impact of, and tolerance for, aircraft noise varies widely from person to person. Consensus about the impact of noise and how it should be distributed is, at best very difficult to achieve in this environment.
- In addressing the impact of aircraft operations on community well-being, it is critical that a balance is struck between aircraft noise, aircraft emissions and the economic contribution of aircraft operations at the airport concerned.
- Airservices has a comprehensive framework to ensure that communities affected by aircraft noise have access to information on aircraft operations which will be enhanced through the course of 2010 as measures outlined in the Aviation White Paper are implemented.

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2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following section provides background information against the Terms of Reference for the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee's 'Inquiry into Airservices Australia's Management of Aircraft Noise'.

Specifically, "….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."

Comments against each item follows.

(a) Has conducted an effective, open and informed public consultation strategy with communities affected by aircraft noise

Airservices has a comprehensive framework in place that provides communities affected by aircraft noise with broad access to information about aircraft operations and what consultation precedes implementation of any significant change.

The effective management of the aviation industry's impact on the environment is a shared accountability of airlines, airports, government departments and the community who increasingly benefit from access to safe and efficient air transport.

Consultation mechanisms and strategies in place for communities affected by aircraft noise include the following:

Community Consultative Forums

In recognition of the shared responsibilities between the various industry stakeholders, consultative forums and committees have been established by major airports to review the impact of aircraft noise exposure on surrounding communities and, in a consultative manner, make recommendations to minimise the effect of aircraft noise.

Airservices' consultation obligations with regard to flight path change, which is required for safety reasons, are usually addressed by a consultation model primarily focused on industry and government. This approach uses the airport led community noise committees as the appropriate interface with communities and consultation is based on sharing information and raising awareness to assist in decision making and implementation. Committee members are then able, and are expected by the Committee to inform their respective constituencies. Further discussions can then be held on areas of substantial concern.

These committees are in place for Australia's major airports and include:

- Sydney Airport Community Forum;
- Perth Airport Aircraft Noise Management Consultative Committee;
- Canberra Airport Aircraft Noise Consultative Forum;
- Gold Coast Airport Noise Abatement Consultative Committee;
- Melbourne Airport Noise Abatement Committee;
- Essendon Airport Noise Working Group;
- Adelaide Airport Consultative Committee;
- Brisbane Airport Community Forum;
- Cairns Airport Environmental Consultative Committee.

Airservices participates in these committees and forums to communicate changes in flight corridor design and operation to the community.

By way of example, the Perth Airport Aircraft Noise Management Consultative Committee has been established to contribute to the successful management of aircraft noise impact for Perth Airport.

The strategy for the management of aircraft noise identifies key issues and actions for implementation:

1. Monitor landuse planning in the vicinity of Perth Airport;
2. Monitor existing and review proposed Noise Abatement Procedures;
3. Produce and monitor Australian noise exposure contour plans;
4. Monitor and review aircraft engine ground running activity;
5. Monitor and review the existing noise monitoring programme;
6. Review through a consultative environmental assessment process any changes to airspace management procedures being undertaken by Airservices
7. Inform existing and prospective owners of properties of aircraft noise impacts
8. Facilitate the education of the community about aircraft operations

Membership of the Committee is determined by Westralia Airports Corporation (the lessee of Perth Airport) and comprises Federal Members of Parliament representing electorates impacted by aircraft noise, representatives of municipalities affected by aircraft noise and community representatives from high noise affected areas.

Also representatives from relevant Federal and State Government agencies will participate together with representatives of the aviation industry. Each member of the Committee is responsible for ensuring that progress and achievements of the Committee are communicated effectively to the organisation or group that the individual represents.

The Committee meets quarterly but may review the frequency of meetings taking into account current issues and their urgency, however, a minimum frequency of two meetings annually applies. Members of the Committee may request adhoc meetings should urgent issues arise. Westralia Airports Corporation chairs the meetings and provides secretarial services.

The composition and effectiveness of community noise committees at major airports varies across the country, however most are highly organised and well attended. Most airports have voluntarily initiated various forms of community engagement, and determining how best to engage communities has been an issue that has been the responsibility of airports.

Although most airports manage information relating to the consultation committees, Airservices considers that the wider dissemination of information relating to the membership of these committees and the outcomes of the discussions would improve community engagement. Airservices is currently exploring options to enhance sections of its own website to make committee related information easier to find and more comprehensive.

The National Aviation Policy White Paper has announced the requirement for the establishment of Community Aviation Consultation Groups at federal airports subject to the planning framework in the Airports Act. These groups will help address planning and development issues and a range of other operational issues, such as aircraft noise.

Tailored Consultative Forums

Airservices has recently developed more detailed community consultation processes with the advent of new satellite based navigation technology. Where flight path change proposals are not primarily safety related, there is often greater opportunity to involve communities during the design of proposals. This may be where various operational, environmental (reduction in aircraft emissions) and efficiency drivers are also being pursed and in these cases, Airservices tailors its consultation accordingly.

This recently developed approach identifies the level of consultation required with the community beyond the airport noise community committees, the need to personally brief community stakeholders, the effectiveness of Airservices' targeted information mediums and the strength and nature of support for, and opposition to, a proposed change with aircraft noise implications for the local airport community.

An example of where Airservices' employs a tailored approach to consultation is for Required Navigation Performance (RNP) proposals. RNP technology allows aircraft to track a flight path with high precision and therefore contain related noise within a much narrower corridor and in most instances at a reduced level due to continuous descent of the aircraft (with engines on idle). Less people in total may be affected by a particular flight path after the introduction of RNP, however some who are affected may be impacted to a greater degree.

Noise and Flight Path Monitoring System (NFPMS)

Since 2000, Airservices has employed a Noise and Flight Path Monitoring System (NFPMS) at Australia's major airports to collect noise and flight path data. This system is the world's largest, most geographically spread of its type and collects aircraft noise and flight path data on a continuous basis.

Aircraft noise data is received from noise monitors located in communities close to an airport and correlated with detailed flight information from Airservices' air traffic control systems.

The information collected is used to:

- determine the contribution of aircraft to overall noise exposure;
- detect occurrences of excessive noise levels from aircraft operations;
- assess the effects of operational and administrative procedures for noise control and compliance with these procedures;
- assist in planning of airspace usage;
- validate noise forecasts and forecasting techniques;
- assist relevant authorities in land use planning for developments on areas in the vicinity of an airport; and
- generate reports and provide responses to questions from Government, industry organisations, community groups and individuals.

A sample report is included in Attachment A.

WebTrak

An important milestone in the continual improvement of public information relating to aircraft noise was the launch in December 2008 of Airservices WebTrak, a free interactive service which allows the public to observe aircraft movements from the Airservices website in near-real time (delayed by 40 minutes for aviation security reasons) at a number of key locations. This includes information about individual aircraft such as aircraft type, altitude, destination and noise levels. The information is then displayed on a detailed map (road or aerial) which enables the user to zoom down to their street level.

- In *Current Flights* mode the general public can view current operations around the airport.
- In *Replay Mode* the general public can access flight information and noise data for the previous two weeks.

The WebTrak service is provided to inform the community about aircraft operations and noise in their area and enables the identification of discrete noise events and the separation of aviation related events from non-aviation related ones (eg a passing truck or train).

Airservices would be pleased to provide a demonstration of this system to the Committee if the Committee felt this would be helpful.

Noise Enquiry Unit (NEU)

Established since 1996, Airservices' Noise Enquiry Unit (NEU) has provided the public with an opportunity to seek quick responses to aircraft noise complaints and enquiries. The NEU is not a resolution service, rather requested information is provided to the public and summary reports or information are provided to relevant airports, airlines and authorities as appropriate. The NEU is staffed during normal business hours and can be contacted via phone, fax, mail, email and the Internet on a 24-hour basis.

The approximate cost of operating the NEU (including the NFPMS and Web Trak systems) in 2009/10 is $6.5 million.

Other Web Based Information

The Airservices website is a vital link between the organisation and the community. An 'Aircraft Noise' page has been designed to provide both aviation stakeholders and the general public with information about aviation and aircraft noise.

The general public can use these pages to find out about the regulations concerning aircraft noise, how to apply for noise certification of an aircraft, examine noise statistics and noise abatement procedures for major airports, and learn about the services of the noise enquiry unit. Members of the public can use it to lodge a complaint regarding aircraft noise by using an online form or to obtain the Noise Enquiry Unit contact numbers.

Direct links to the Airservices website and information pages are also made available from many of the community consultative forum pages hosted on airport websites.

For example, the Perth Airport website contains a page titled 'Noise Management at Perth Airport'. The page provides a direct link to the Airservices website for information relating to aircraft noise.

An extract from the Perth Airport corporate website explains further:

<extract>

Noise Management at Perth Airport

http://www.perthairport.net.au/default.aspx?MenuID=48

Useful Weblinks - Flight Path Information

To track flight activity in to and out of Perth International Airport, along with information about each aircraft click here *(links to WebTrack)*

For Noise and Flight Path Monitoring Reports click here *(links to www.airservicesaustralia.com.au/projectsservices/reports/nfpms/nfpmsperth.asp)*

To find out about the regulations concerning aircraft noise or to look at noise statistics through Airservices Australia click here *(links to www.airservicesaustralia.com.au/aviationenvironment/noise/default.asp)*

How do I lodge a noise enquiry with Airservices Australia?
If you have an enquiry relating to flight paths or aircraft noise and would like to lodge an enquiry with Airservices Australia, you can do so through their dedicated Aircraft Noise Enquiry Line. Freecall: 1800 802 584 Local call: 1300 302 240
Alternatively visit their website at: (click here) for more information click here (links to www.airservicesaustralia.com/ncm/)

When you lodge an enquiry with Airservices Australia you will be asked to leave the date, time and location of the noise event, with your name and address and phone number if you wish to be contacted. Airservices logs all enquiries made to the Aircraft Noise Enquiry Unit and provides information with respect to the enquiry as soon as practicable.

The Western Australia Route Review Project (WARRP) was a review of airspace use, flight routes and aviation procedures across Western Australia. The review was undertaken by Airservices Australia between 2006 and 2008. Click here to find out more information. (links to www.airservicesaustralia.com.au/projectsservices/projects/waroutereview/communityinfo.asp

Aircraft Movement Statistics: This table details the most recent aircraft movement statistics for Perth as supplied by Airservices Australia (ASA). Click here to download the Aircraft Movement Statistics. (links to /www.airservicesaustralia.com.au/projectsservices/reports/nfpms/nfpmsperth.asp)

Key points:

- Airservices' community consultation with regard to flight path change which is required for safety reasons is predominantly conducted through airport community noise consultation committees and forums.
- Airservices has developed a tailored consultation process to incorporate a greater element of community engagement.
- Airservices' Noise and Flight Path Monitoring System, WebTrak and other dedicated applications provide ongoing information to communities affected by aircraft noise at no cost to users.
- In 2010 Airservices will establish an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman which will further improve community consultation arrangements.

(b) Engages with industry and business stakeholders in an open, informed and reasonable way

Airservices takes its engagement with industry and business very seriously and participates in a wide range of established forums and industry groups, as well as managing a comprehensive program of direct engagement with individual airlines, airports and Government agencies.

Industry Forums

As either a full member, observer/adviser or through regular consultation with aviation peak bodies Airservices engages with the following:

- State Regional Airspace Users Advisory Committees;
- Australian Strategic Air Traffic Management Group;
- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association of Australia;
- Board of Airline Representatives of Australia;
- Recreation Aviation Australia;
- Regional Aviation Association of Australia;
- Australian Airports Association;
- Aviation Safety Forum;
- Australian Women Pilot's Association;
- Capacity and Service Improvement Forum.

Airservices engages in the forums or with the listed industry representative bodies on a wide range of issues relating to developing an optimum air traffic management system for Australia. This assist industry in coordinating agreed integrated planning, development and implementation effort by all relevant stakeholders.

'Waypoint' - Airservices Annual Industry Conference

'Waypoint' is Airservices' annual premier industry consultation forum designed to bring together industry partners to consult on the air navigation issues and initiatives that are critical to the future success of the Australian aviation industry. It brings together senior representatives of the industry including airports, domestic and international airlines, government and experts in a range of aviation fields.

International and domestic experts from industry and government discuss issues critical to the future of air traffic services, and are able to share their views at interactive workshops on safety, air traffic control, finance and infrastructure.

Further information, presentations and outcomes from the previous four Waypoint events are available on Airservices' website. A direct link to the page along with a list of other web based references is included in Attachment B.

Relationship Managers

Airservices' Industry Relations team manages the relationship with airline operators, airport owners and the Department of Defence. The fostering and management of a productive, positive and cooperative relationship between stakeholders, airline customers and other government agencies involved in aviation activity is critical to maintaining a safe and efficient air traffic management system in Australia and surrounding regions.

This interaction provides an important opportunity for all stakeholders to communicate with Airservices on a range of issues that relate to air traffic control, technical infrastructure, fire fighting service provision, airline operations, airport operations and Defence activity.

Individual Airline and Airport Relationship Managers are employed to create and enhance the relationships. This methodology ensures a coordinated, considered and timely whole-of-organisation approach to managing important cross industry issues such as the assessment of Airport Master Plans, Major Development Plans and various issues that require a whole of industry approach.

Airservices senior management meets on a regular basis at senior level with individual airlines and airports also to further forge relationships and allow an opportunity for a high level discussion on issues that require a more immediate response.

Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey

Each year, Airservices commissions an independent Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey to gauge the effectiveness of our relationship management framework and gain deeper insight into the perceptions of our key stakeholders; Airlines, Airports, Defence and other Government departments such as our regulator CASA, ATSB, and Infrastructure.

In 2009, a positive response was received from industry stakeholders with the overall satisfaction rating improving. Over 82% of all stakeholder respondents indicated that they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' in the services Airservices provides.

The survey highlighted some of the strengths of the relationship management structure as well as some of the areas that need more attention. The results are taken very seriously and any areas for improvement are identified as part of an ongoing improvement process incorporated within the organisation.

Industry Reporting

In 2008, Airservices commenced publication of a quarterly report to the Australian aviation industry in response to customer and stakeholder requests for more frequent, detailed information on the Airservices/industry agenda. An example of a recent report is included in Attachment C.

Daily Operation Reviews and Continuous Improvement

Irrespective of how well industry, government and the community work together to achieve greater effectiveness in managing issues such as the impact of aircraft noise on the community, there will always remain operational elements outside their combined control.

The weather is the most obvious non-controllable aspect of aircraft operations and remains a critical factor in Airservices' capacity to select optimal flight corridors for noise abatement where safety may be compromised. The impact of weather on aircraft movements is as significant as it is broad, ranging from dictating runway direction and flight paths used to forcing changes to flight schedules and affecting on-time performance. Other factors may include the closure or restriction of airspace for military use or airport capacity constraints which can limit the number of aircraft arriving or departing an airport.

To effectively manage these constraints, Airservices conducts daily operational reviews of the national airways system to identify constraints and blockages in the flow of traffic between airports. This information is used in collaboration with key stakeholders to change daily flight plans, re-route aircraft or modify departure and arrival times.

The daily operational review process allows Airservices and its major stakeholders to make longer term improvements in the national airways system. By knowing, understanding and responding to continual constraints in the system, the industry is in a better position to engage government and the broader community on longer term changes that may impact the way in which aircraft noise is managed.

Key points:

- Airservices engages with industry and business stakeholders through participation in a wide range of established forums.
- Regular contact also occurs at senior level with aviation peak bodies, airlines and airports.
- Airservices conducts an annual conference (Waypoint) for industry and government.
- Airservices publishes a quarterly report to the Australian aviation industry.

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

Under Section of the *Air Services Act 1995* Airservices' is required to consult widely, stating that *"In the performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers, Airservices Australia must, where appropriate, consult with government, commercial, industrial, consumer and other relevant bodies and organisations (including ICAO and bodies representing the aviation industry)."*

Section 160(2)(c) of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) requires Commonwealth agencies to consider advice from the Minister responsible for the environment before authorising the adoption or implementation of a plan for aviation airspace management involving aircraft operations that have, will have or are likely to have a significant impact on the environment.

To determine whether an airspace change proposal might be significant under the EPBC Act, in 1997 Airservices in consultation with the (then) Department of Transport and Regional Development established a set of principles following industry and nation-wide community consultation (including town hall type meetings in capital cities) for use as threshold criteria. Airservices preference and normal practice is to re-design procedures that would potentially have significant impact on the community. These principles were updated in 2002 and are available on Airservices' website.

The document, 'Environment Principles and procedures for minimising the impact of aircraft noise' is included at Attachment D.

A broad Ministerial Direction number M37/99, issued 3 May 1999 in relation to the performance of its environmental activities, also provides Airservices with additional broad guidance on consultation under part (iii) where it states that Airservices is to *"Initiate and participate in discussions, consultations, studies and research with aviation industry and the community in relation to environmental aspects of air traffic management."*
A copy of the Direction is included at Attachment E.

Key points:

- The EPBC Act contains a trigger whereby airspace change proposals are assessed to determine if they would have a *significant* environmental impact.
- Airservices has a legislated obligation to consult, where appropriate, with government, commercial, industrial, consumer and other relevant bodies and organisations.
- Airservices uses threshold criteria established through extensive industry and community consultation to test if proposals are *significant* under the Act.
- If considered *significant* under the Act, proposals are referred to the Minister responsible for the environment for advice.

(d) Is accountable, as a government-owned corporation, for the conduct of its noise management strategy

Airservices is subject to a wide range of public accountability mechanisms to ensure an appropriate level of scrutiny occurs into the organisation's performance.

Corporate Plan

Airservices is bound by the reporting requirements of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* which include a requirement for Corporate Plans and Annual Reports to be developed and tabled in Parliament.

Airservices also receives direct guidance from Government through a 'Statement of Expectations' from the relevant portfolio Minister and responds with a Statement of Intent and annual (5-year) Corporate Plan.

The current Statement of Expectations (1 November 2008 to 30 June 2010) includes that *"Airservices will: …..support the Government's environmental initiatives in relation to climate change and aircraft noise management…"*

These documents highlight Airservices' environment priorities and collaborative initiatives with the aviation industry, CASA and community groups to reduce aircraft noise, fuel burn and emissions. Performance against the Corporate Plan is reported quarterly to the Minister and in Airservices' Annual Report.

The Minister may also formally direct Airservices to undertake specified actions or activities as provided by Section 16 of the *Air Services Act 1995*. Such Ministerial Directions are reported in Airservices' Annual Report.

A copy of the Annual Report and Corporate Plan is available on the Airservices website. The Statement of Expectations is included in Attachment F.

Senate Estimates Hearings

Airservices appears before a Senate Estimates Committee three times a year where questions may be asked under parliamentary privilege on any matter. Senators may use the hearings to raise questions relating to Airservices role in a range of activities including those associated with aircraft noise.

Other parliamentary processes are available to scrutinise the organisation such as Question Time, questions formally placed on Notice and the conduct of committee inquiries. All parliamentary debates and tabled information are broadcast or published with transcripts readily available to the public.

Other Reporting

Airservices also publishes a broad range of aircraft and associated noise-related information on a continuous basis. These reports are available to the public at no cost from Airservices' website and include:

- aircraft movement statistics for all major airports (monthly) *Attachment G*
- peak hour air traffic management performance reports for Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney (generally daily); *Attachment H*
- Australian Noise Exposure Index Reports for Sydney (bi-annually); and *Attachment I*
- Sydney Airport Operational Statistics (Monthly). *Attachment J*

In addition, the WebTrak system previously discussed allows members of the public to generate customised reports on demand.

Freedom of Information

Airservices is covered by the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Documents relating to the category 'environment' are held by Airservices as paper records or on optical, audio or digital media.

Aircraft Noise Ombudsman

In accordance with the National Aviation Policy White Paper, Airservices will establish an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman in 2010 to independently review noise complaint handling procedures and to improve Airservices' consultation arrangements and the presentation and distribution of aircraft noise-related information to the public.

Key points:

- The Government's expectation of Airservices' performance is regularly updated and publicly available.
- Airservices' Statement of Intent, Corporate Plan and Annual Report are published.
- A range of parliamentary processes are used and available to publicly scrutinise Airservices' performance.
- Members of the public can access information through Freedom of Information provisions.
- Airservices will establish an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman in 2010.

(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

Airservices' legislative responsibility to protect the environment from the operation and use of aircraft covers many environmental aspects in addition to noise.

In addressing these environmental demands, Airservices aims to achieve the lowest possible overall impact on the community and to strike a balance between the need to improve airspace safety, efficiency and aircraft emissions. Where possible flight paths are designed to avoid high-density residential areas where the greatest number of people are likely to be affected by noise.

Modern navigation technology is used to route aircraft away from population centres where it is possible to do so and procedures are designed to improve the noise performance and emissions of aircraft landing and taking off. However, designs always need to achieve a balance. Directing aircraft away from towns means they fly further and increase their emissions; flying more direct routes may mean more noise for those on the ground.

As major airports are located within or close to cities, overflight of some residential areas cannot be avoided. In such situations Airservices routes aircraft over water and non-residential land such as industrial areas, parks and highways as much as practicable. However, the ability to do so is limited by the location of population areas in relation to an airport, terrain, prevailing winds, runway orientation, areas of restricted (including military) airspace, available technology and the operational requirements of aircraft with the safety of operations being the most important consideration.

Noise Abatement Procedures

Noise Abatement Procedures have been established at all major and many secondary airports as a further noise mitigation measure. These procedures vary but typically include:

- preferred runways to be used during the course of a day;
- preferred flight paths, local restrictions (such as conducting engine runs prior to take-off), and curfew restrictions; and
- information about aircraft altitude, airspeed and navigation requirements in the vicinity of the aerodrome.

Most Noise Abatement Procedures are developed by respective airport noise community consultation committees, which include community, airport, airline and Airservices representation, however others are developed solely by (smaller) airports and provided to Airservices for publication.

Noise Abatement Procedures are published by Airservices' Aeronautical Information Service and form part of formal Aerodrome and Procedure Charts which are available at no cost on the organisation's website.

Subject to safety and operational requirements at any given time, Airservices' air traffic controllers incorporate local Noise Abatement Procedures into their instructions to aircraft. Follow-up actions to breaches of Noise Abatement Procedures vary depending on the

situation but typically include discussion with the airport noise consultation committee which would subsequently raise the matter formally with the pilot/airline involved.

By way of example; a noise abatement area applies to most areas of Canberra and Queanbeyan. Aircraft will normally be routed to avoid the noise abatement area, which includes Gungahlin, North Canberra, Belconnen, South Canberra, Woden, Tuggeranong and Queanbeyan. Where it is not practical for aircraft to remain clear of those areas, overflight of the noise abatement area is restricted to heights of not lower than 7,000 feet by jet aircraft, and 5,000 feet by large propeller driven aircraft.

In Cairns, a number of procedures have been established to reduce the impact of noise on local residents. These include:

- Jet aircraft will be routed clear of populous areas until seawards of the coastline or established on their final approach course. To assist with noise reduction on final approach course, pilots are requested to delay flap deployment until as late as is operationally practicable;
- Circuit training by jet propelled aircraft (and other aircraft exceeding 5700kg) is not permitted between 2200 and 0700 local time;
- No aircraft is permitted to conduct engine runs (unless associated with the normal preparation of flight) between 2300 and 0600 local time without permission from the Cairns Port Authority; and
- Operators and pilots of jet aircraft are requested to cooperate in limiting the use of reverse thrust when landing between the hours of 2300 and 0600 local time.

Noise Sharing

Sydney is an example where the principle of noise sharing has been formalised through establishment of the Sydney Airport Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP). LTOP was developed by Airservices and other Government agencies in 1996-97 and puts in place noise sharing arrangements developed in consultation with the Sydney community. The concept of respite is an integral component of fairly sharing aircraft noise, particularly for residents close to the airport.

Under LTOP, subject to safety and weather conditions, when making runway selections each day Airservices ensures that:

- as many flights as practicable use flight paths over water or non-residential areas;
- remaining air traffic is spread or shared over surrounding communities as fairly as possible; and
- runway use and associated flight paths change throughout the day so individual communities enjoy respite from aircraft noise on most days.

LTOP also has noise sharing targets for the amount of aircraft movement to the north, south, east and west of the airport. The plan is designed to place as many flights as possible to the south (over water) and for the remaining flights to be shared between the three other directions as equally as operationally feasible. Airservices' implementation of LTOP is monitored by a committee which includes community representation, and monthly reports on the number of aircraft using respective runways and flight paths is available on the Airservices web site. A sample report is included at Attachment J.

Brisbane Green Project

A recent initiative at Brisbane is an example where Airservices has used new technology to reduce both greenhouse gas and noise emissions whilst also improving the efficiency of Brisbane airspace and the operation of Brisbane Airport.

Known as the 'Brisbane Green Project', in early 2007 Airservices commenced a trial of RNP technology incorporating 6 approach and 12 departure flight paths. This project was a world-first at a busy international airport and has proved highly successful. A report on Stage 1 of the trial (January 2007 to January 2008) is available on the Airservices web site.

Key points:

- Airservices has a legislative obligation to, as far as is practicable, protect the environment from the effects of the operation and use of aircraft. However, Airservices' primary responsibility is to regard safety as the most important consideration.
- Protecting the environment from the impacts of aircraft operations involves managing both greenhouse gas and noise emissions.
- "Noise abatement procedures" are published for every major airport to ensure noise impact is minimised and distributed equitably.
- Many of the new initiatives implemented by Airservices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions also reduce aircraft noise.
- Overflight of some residential areas cannot be avoided, however Airservices routes aircraft over water and non-residential areas as much as is practicable.
- Sydney is an example where the principle of noise sharing has been formalised.
- Brisbane is an example where Airservices has used new technology to reduce both greenhouse gas and noise emissions.

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

As discussed earlier in this submission, Airservices has a comprehensive program to ensure that stakeholders affected by aircraft noise have the opportunity to be informed about aircraft activities and participate in various consultation processes.

It is important to note, however, that no matter how comprehensive and inclusive consultation processes are, it is unreasonable to expect a community to agree on the location and level of aircraft activity overhead or how such activity might subsequently impact another community.

Airservices takes its community consultative responsibilities very seriously. Over $6.5m per annum is currently committed to the management of aircraft noise, actively participating in community consultative forums and operating specific tools such as the NFPMS, WebTrak, direct linkages through the Airservices website and the Noise Enquiry Unit.

Airservices recognises that as air traffic continues to grow, noise will increasingly become an issue of concern to more communities. Airservices welcomes the Government's announcement of a new Aircraft Noise Ombudsman and moves to require the establishment of Community Aviation Consultation Groups for federal airports, designed to formalise and enhance existing consultation activities within a framework that encourages the adoption of best practice standards.

Airservices is confident that this additional emphasis on noise management, and the degree of independent oversight already in place on Airservices' core operations, will provide adequate mechanisms to ensure sound and effective consultation with communities affected by aircraft noise.

Airservices also considers that the provisions of the EPBC Act and associated assessment criteria in relation to any changes made to aircraft operations establish the requisite formal mechanisms for consultation on significant changes.

It is important to recognise, that safety is first and foremost in the development and establishment of flight paths.

Key points:

- There are a number of existing forums for community consultation and these will be further enhanced by measures taken by Airservices and outlined in the Aviation White Paper
- Residential amenity is protected under the EPBC Act.
- The safety of aviation is the foremost determinant of flight paths.
