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# Stateline New South Wales

Transcript

## Sydney Airport-New Safety Fears

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QUENTIN DEMPSTER: Welcome to Stateline.

I'm Quentin Dempster.

Airports are in the news again, with reports that the State Government has been considering Sutton Forest in the Southern Highlands as a site for a second jet airport.

Now there's another factor for everyone to consider.

A flight path study of Sydney airport operations has claimed serious safety concerns.

What's known as LTOP -- the Long Term Operating Plan -- was meant to minimise take-offs and landings over residential areas by directing aircraft movements as much as possible over water.

But the study has shown increasing use of flight paths over residential Sydney -- not less -- over the last six years.

Sydney airport's risk profile is now said to be much higher, particularly given the airport's latest master plan to expand capacity over the next

20 years.

As well, the LTOP was meant to make fair noise-sharing the operational imperative.

The study, released today by the Sydney Airport Community Forum, funded by aircraft noise protest groups across greater Sydney, claims that instead of sharing noise equitably, it's being consolidated for what looks like cynical political purposes.

Over the years, Stateline's done many stories about that old bugbear, aircraft noise, following Laurie Brereton's gift to the people of Sydney -- the third runway.

In 1997, under the Howard Government, a noise abatement and sharing regime called LTOP -- the Long Term Operating Plan -- was introduced.

With plane traffic declining a little since the 2000 Olympics, the cap on take-offs and landings to 80 an hour plus the 11pm-6am curfew, the political heat about noise has diminished substantially.

GRAEME HARRISON, SACF INC: This is the most commonly used mode at Kingsford Smith Airport.

These are jet arrivals and departures.

The arrivals are the reds, the departures are the green.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: But today the Sydney Airport Community Forum Inc -- originally formed by former Liberal member for Lowe Paul Zammit, and not to be mistaken with the government-appointed Sydney Airport Community Forum -- published its analysis of six years' operations of the LTOP.

Of primary interest to Stateline was this group's claims not about noise, but about safety.

Let's deal with the claims sequentially.

First increased residential fly-overs.

GRAEME HARRISON: This graphic shows us what happened before the Long Term Operating Plan came in.

29 per cent of take-offs were over populated areas of Sydney.

So, in fact, intentionally they took off over the bay.

What happens now is typically around 52 per cent.

So it's been a 65 per cent increase in the intentional risk exposure to people because of the take-offs over people.

Now some of these planes have 160 tonnes of hydrocarbons on board and they're intentionally sent over heavily populated areas when the bay is there and world's best practice dictates -- and even the Russians use -- if you have a water exit from the airport, they should take off over water.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: The greater risk is on take-off?

GRAEME HARRISON: In Sydney, the three historic crashes have happened where there has been equipment failure after take-off.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: The group claimed the original over-water arrival routes, seen here in red, the LTOP had originally designated had been abandoned in practice.

The next safety claim -- take-off flight paths have a low-altitude ceiling, under arrival flight paths, diminishing aircraft separation safety margins, increasing the risk of mid-air collision.

GRAEME HARRISON: This is the example where a plane taking off away from the airport heads and climbs up and then takes a direction away.

But in fact, they're up and there's meant to be a 1,000ft separation.

This has two effects.

Sometimes the arrivals are lower than they're meant to be because they're coming in trying to land so they're trying to stay low and also then it's in fact the take-offs are in that same space.

But in addition, it forces the take-offs to be unnecessarily low over people which has crash risk, pollution and noise impact.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: It's claimed that aviation best practice should require aircraft departure flight paths to track immediately over arriving jets, not under as practised at Sydney airport.

Next, claims that jets departing north from the third runway are restricted to tightly designated flight paths -- one contentiously requiring a low and sharp right-hand turn over nearby suburbs, instead of tracking north-east over the Eastern Suburbs.

Our cameraman got these pictures during the morning peak on Tuesday this week showing planes banking sharply to the right immediately after they'd left the runway.

HENRI RICHARD, SACF INC: In the east, these two flight paths are actually specified by vector pulses from the airport to make sure the planes do not stray at all.

This concentration is extraordinary.

It's only a matter of a few hundred metres difference when measured in Paddington, the displacement of the aircraft.

Basically, the turn occurs at almost the minimum allowed by the International Civil Aviation Authority.

It occurs at 500ft.

The minimum is 400ft, as I understand.

The right turn avoids 3km of the airport land so that, in fact, these planes don't make noise over the domestic terminal.

They avoid airport land, they avoid the light industrial area just north of the airport and they go straight out on to residents of Botany, Eastlakes, Kingsford, Kensington, Maroubra and South Coogee.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: Sydney Airport Community Forum Inc has now tabled its analysis with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority Department of Transport and Air Services Australia.

These are serious allegations your group is making.

What do you want to happen now?

PHILIP LINGARD, SECRETARY SACF, INC: We would like to see a fully independent safety audit of the LTOP the Long Term operating Plan, with a regard to the safety of the crossing-over arrival and departure regimes.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: The government-appointed Airport Community Forum, chaired by Liberal senator Marise Payne, has commissioned Melbourne consultant Airplan to review the LTOP.

A report's due by June 11, but the review's terms of reference only cover noise-sharing modes, not safety.

As you know, there's always been a lot of politics surrounding aircraft noise, but what this dissenting group now asserts, with deep

scepticism, is that LTOP has entrenched politically determined flight paths, most notably avoiding the noisiest jet take-offs over Liberal party seats on the North Shore, with planes tracking noticeably to the west and east of Prime Minister John Howard's electorate now known satirically to air traffic controllers and pilots as Mount Bennelong.

HENRI RICHARD: This is a political set of flight paths.

There is a joke, in the sense that, basically everybody thinks they're sharing the noise and when you talk to people under one of these flight paths they believe they're sharing the noise.

There's an 85 degree emptiness here of jet departures.

I think generally its conceded there's a sort of Mount Bennelong.

And we're expected to put up with these manoeuvres.

There's a 65 per cent increase in this mode when all this should be out over the bay.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: Dick Tanner, a retired stockbroker and former member of the Liberal party is the chairman of Sydney Airport Community Forum Inc.

He says the LTOP is unfair on noise and riskier on safety.

And with the latest master plan expanding the capacity of Sydney airport over the next 20 years, the unfairness and risk will grow.

DICK TANNER, CHAIRMAN SACF: The number of passengers in 20 years time which is proposed to come into KSA is going to be in the vicinity of 68 million.

Now, the most busiest airport in the world is Chicago -- or one of the most busiest -- and it's got 68 million passengers.

It needs something like 900,000 aircraft movements to achieve that 68 million passengers.

At the moment, we have 230,000-240,000 aircraft movements a year.

So brace yourself, Sydney, its going to get three to four times as bad.

There is a profound concern amongst our group that the airport is not being run in a safe manner.

Now there is a multi-faceted approach to this problem and there are a very large number of issues that have to be addressed.

But basically, we don't believe that these issues have been addressed and the thing is just running out of control.

There is a perception and we think we've proved that there's too much politics in all this and politics and safety don't mix.

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: Stateline sought interviews with all the regulators -- the Minister of Transport, John Anderson, Civil Aviation Safety Authority chief executive Bruce Byron and the head of Air Services Australia, Bernie Smith, to address the points raised here.

All declined or were unavailable.

Air Services Australia says it would be inappropriate to comment on one of the submissions to the government-appointed forum's LTOP review.

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