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12th January 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Airservices Australia's Management of Aircraft Noise.

I submit that Airservices Australia should review the guidelines which govern the flight paths used by medivac helicopters over residential areas.

I acknowledge that the usual reaction to such a proposal is that it would interfere with the ability of medivac to respond quickly to a situation.

However – for every flight to a hospital there is one flight back to base, and on many occasions these helicopters are taking crew members back to their work locations or to a destination for non urgent reasons. In which case they could adopt a flight path appropriate for a non emergency aircraft.

Consider residents who live in the vicinity of a major hospital with a helipad. Such hospitals can receive up to a dozen flights per day – at any time of the day or night. I contend that a review be made of present guidelines which govern the flight paths and altitude of these helicopters.

At present, it is the case that the place of origin of the flight determines the approach path and vice versa. There appears to be no regard for the type of settlement beneath the flight path. Be it urban residential, high density residential, open park land, roads, railways or what ever. Also some pilots stay at around 500 ft until they are over the hospital grounds and then descend to the pad. Others descend to 200 ft or less about 500 metres from the hospital and then come in at that altitude over houses. Of course wind speed and direction have some bearing on the approach and take off path.

The Energex BK117 helicopter at 200 ft above one's house registers more than 100 decibels of engine noise at ground level, and you add to that the noise of "blade slap" which causes much discomfort.

I also acknowledge that the rescue helicopter service is somewhat of a "sacred cow" issue which enjoys a high level of public support. But that should not mean

they operate without regard to residents who have been living for years under what has now become busy flight paths for noisy helicopters. Airfields are normally located away from residential areas but in this case an airfield has moved into a residential area. There are presently regulations regarding flight altitude but nothing regarding flight paths.

The standard rebuttal of the non-technical on this subject is to say (a) Approach flight paths are governed entirely by wind at all times – not true! I am told that helicopter pilots can accommodate winds up to 8 knots which does not influence approach or take-off direction. (b) Every second counts in a medivac mission – not true! – Around 80% of patients are stabilized before the flight and so a few seconds is not critical. And we are talking of a possible maximum of 20 seconds in a 20 to 30 minute flight.

So I submit that:-

- 1) That Airservices Australia should formulate regulations/recommendations governing helicopter approach and departure flight paths over residential areas so that flight paths would avoid residential areas. Traffic could be over major roads or over commercial areas or along water course alignments or over open space – Such regulation would apply particularly to night flights.
- 2) That Airservices Australia should regulate the altitude of emergency helicopter flights over residential areas and provide guidelines to pilots on procedures for landing and take-off in residential areas so as to have minimal noise impact to nearby residents.

Greg Pitman