

Community Aviation Alliance Australia opening statement to Senate hearing on impact and mitigation of aircraft noise

Thank you for the opportunity to appear at this important hearing.

Community Aviation Alliance Australia (CAAA) is an Australia-wide coalition of community advocacy groups impacted by aircraft noise. Our shared aim is to ensure that the impact of the aviation industry on Australian communities, in particular the detrimental effects of aircraft noise and operations, are better understood, regulated, and mitigated. This inquiry is focused on the IMPACT and MITIGATION of aircraft noise and the submissions of CAAA and other individual community groups highlight the issues in these areas.

Firstly, the impact of noise on ordinary people is real. We want to get across to you as decision makers how debilitating aircraft noise can be for some people in terms of well-being, mental health, and general amenity. Noise adversely affects people in their day-to-day lives as badly as other pollutants and evidenced by the number of complaints received from impacted communities. It's not acceptable in today's sustainable society that aircraft noise is largely unregulated unlike other industries that have had to adapt to societal expectations.

We also want to highlight the specific noise issues impacting communities under the flight paths of General Aviation airports such as Moorabbin (Melbourne), Jandakot (Perth), Bankstown (Sydney), Archerfield (Brisbane) and Parafield (Adelaide) caused by highly repetitive circuit training as distinct from those at the major airports. These movements, which can number between 500-1,000 flyovers a day, following the same circular flight path warrant separate consideration in your final report as mitigation measures will differ at these airports.

CAAA's key issues are:

Australia's current aviation regulatory and policy framework is not fit for purpose in that it:

- has a complete absence of legislation/regulation that effectively protects communities from the harmful health impacts of aircraft noise.
- ignores, the direct and indirect costs of aircraft noise on human health, community amenity, devaluation of property, noise amelioration works or resident relocation and allows the noise polluters (airlines and airports) to externalise these costs to the wider community.
- is a complex and fragmented amalgam of Commonwealth statutes, state and local government land planning legislation managed across multiple portfolios, departments, statutory authorities, heavily weighted towards promoting unfettered growth of the aviation industry.
- relies on State-based planning schemes to limit residential development around airports but has no effective provisions to protect residences from the noise impacts of growing air traffic at existing airports or the development of airports in new locations.

- limits the role of the Commonwealth regulatory agency (CASA) to only managing aircraft safety and efficiency, with nothing in the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998 that specifically deals with CASA's regulation, approval, or administration of airspace, airways, and air routes. This regulatory vacuum fails to protect Australian communities.
- features the ANEF and National Airport Safeguarding Framework (NASF) guidelines which are no longer fit for purpose as they currently stand. It has been over 40 years since the last community study on impacts of aircraft noise was undertaken for the ANEF.
- has an ineffective community consultation process. CACG's do not resolve community concerns, nor do they have any decision-making powers. The current mechanisms and arrangements fail community needs.
- has an ineffective complaint handling system. The current system administered by Air Services Australia is ineffective as the root cause of the complaints is not addressed and people are left frustrated by the process.

Since lodging our CAAA submission the Australian Government has published its Aviation White Paper. There are several initiatives that have benefits for aircraft noise affected communities. However, there are also disappointing gaps we wish to highlight as still requiring urgent attention, in the public interest. These include:

- no policy intent to develop and implement via legislation new aircraft noise standards which can be understood by the community, measured, and monitored to mitigate impacts on community health and amenity, even though we have standards and regulation for most other category of noise and other pollutants such as odor that harm citizens.
- no policy intent or trigger points for mitigation action involving flight caps or nighttime curfews.
- a lack of any balance by pushing and expanding the operation of aircraft in Australia into Advanced Aircraft Mobility (such as drones), resulting in increases in intrusion, noise impacts, loss of privacy and safety risk to communities.

CAAA's key recommendations for improved management and mitigation of aircraft noise are:

1. A new aircraft noise standard, which is easily understood by the community, can be measured, and monitored, and that defines trigger points for noise mitigation actions (options such as revised Noise Abatement Procedures, changed flight paths, noise amelioration to existing dwellings, movement caps, curfews). The values in the standard to be based on the findings of a comprehensive community health study which makes explicit the health impacts and the direct and indirect costs of aviation. These values to be reflected in standards for revised ANEF, NASF, State and Local government land planning regulations, EPBC Act and AS 2021. These must not be guidelines but statutorily enforceable. (We note that examples of noise standards triggering noise amelioration actions exist at Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne (recent third runway approval), and Western Sydney Airports).

2. Thoroughly review and amend the *Airports Act 1996*:
 - add a new subparagraph (bb) into the definition of “major airport development” in section 89(1) of the *Airports Act 1996* (Cth) as follows: “(bb) *altering a flight path in any way that significantly changes the patterns or levels of aircraft noise; or*”.
 - amend Section 81(2) of the *Airports Act 1996* (Cth) to allow the Minister to approve airport Master Plans subject to conditions.
3. Amend the *Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998* Part 71 to define fully CASA's regulation, approval, and administration of airspace, airways, and air routes. This crucial Part has been blank for 26 years.
4. The Aircraft Noise Ombudsman should become part of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, with an appropriate mandate and adequate resourcing.
5. To restore balance, ensure the two key regulators (CASA and the Department) operate under amended legislation requiring appropriate weight be given in decision-making to the concerns of all stakeholders, including community concerns about the impacts and mitigation of aircraft noise. The current paradigm of airline operational efficiency being prioritised over the health and other impacts of aircraft noise must be changed.
6. A refreshed regulatory approach to General Aviation airports conducting repetitive circuit training activities to include noise mitigation strategies such as:
 - sharing of flight paths where alternative runways exist.
 - limiting pilot training activities at night and weekends.
 - limiting movements to not exceed thresholds set in the NASF guidelines.
 - installation of permanent noise monitors at the primary GA airports so that compliance with the NASF and any established aircraft noise standard can be monitored which then allows Airservices, CASA and the ANO to draw on fact-based evidence when making decisions regarding contraventions by aircraft.