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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir / Madam

Inquiry into the effectiveness of Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise

[In response, please quote File Ref: GR/10/19742]

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment to the Senate Standing Committee's inquiry regarding Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise.

This submission wishes to note that despite advancements in technology, medical research, improved management systems and greater transparency and community input, aircraft noise continues to be a significant concern for communities affected by its impact. Although the information about aircraft noise has improved greatly in recent years through the provision of a broad range of data, the basis for planning for future land use and aviation activity remains fragmented.

The inquiry into Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise is both timely and welcome in view of the pressures to accommodate the increasing needs of passenger and freight air services. However, the forecast growth in air traffic and need for additional capacity and services provides little comfort for communities that are currently and likely to be exposed to aircraft noise.

Review of ANEFs

Aircraft noise continues to be a significant environmental issue in the Sutherland Shire. In 2008-09, 186 complaints regarding air traffic noise were made by shire residents to Sydney Air Traffic Services. It is of note that although the greatest number of complaints (48) were made by residents from Kurnell (who are situated within the 20 – 25 ANEF contour) the majority of complaints were from areas much further afield such as Jannali, Caringbah, Cronulla and Bundeena.

The strong response made by residents within and beyond the 20 ANEF contour suggests that the way in which aircraft noise is determined as being "significant" does not reflect the impact that is experienced by the community both in the household and local environment.

It is suggested that a review of the ANEF by Airservices Australia and Standards Australia (Australian Standard AS2021) be undertaken to improve the ANEF model as a guide for land use planning and determining the impact of aircraft noise on the community. The review of the ANEF model should give regard to (but not be limited to) the following matters:

- Inclusion of aircraft noise impacts on outdoor activity
- ANEF averaging of noise peaks over a whole year (which under estimates noise impacts),
- weighting and
- calibration of model components
- the opportunity to incorporate N65 and N70 data /maps for existing and forecast events and community expectations / thresholds

Community response is indicating that despite recent technical reductions in aircraft noise,

- increasing frequency of air traffic,
- increased encroachment into noise sharing periods during the off peak
- reduced periods of respite from aircraft noise and
- concentration of aircraft movement along narrow flight corridors,

is continuing to have an adverse impact across a wider catchment of residential areas.

Airport Capacity, Land Use Activity and ANEFs

The current use of ANEFs provide a measure of the likely future impact of aircraft noise, however they can contract and expand over time in response to changes in air traffic frequency (due to global economic factors and fuel prices) and aircraft engine noise reduction technology for example.

This ability of the ANEF to change over time creates uncertainty for land use planning and long term decision making. To better manage land use impacts and minimise potential encroachments into higher noise affected areas ANEFs should be developed by Airservices Australia that reflect the airport's ultimate capacity. This would enable land use activity to occur without it potentially being impacted upon by changes in aircraft activity and airport growth.

Noise Sharing and Flight Path Corridors

The proposed implementation of narrow flight corridors by Airservices Australia is not supported for Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport (KSA). Although there are various operational advantages, the concentration of aircraft movements over existing urban areas (as recently experienced by residents in the Sutherland Shire) places a greater an unwarranted burden on communities as well as compromising the principles of noise sharing across Sydney.

The application of narrow flight corridors should be applied to new or existing airports linked by corridors that have little impact on urban land use activity.

Curfews

The implementation of aircraft curfews must continue at Sydney KSA. Medical research shows that the potential impact on health from aircraft noise is greatest at night and exposure to aircraft noise should be avoided. A summary of air traffic events during the curfew should be also be incorporated into the monthly statistics available for Sydney airport

A review of aircraft movement during the curfew period needs to be undertaken by Airservices Australia in view of the increasing pressure for more air freight services. The review should identify alternative opportunities for the movement of airfreight where it can be managed efficiently over a 24hr period with minimal impact on the community.

Community Information

The nature of air traffic issues can be complex and require significant technical and operational knowledge which makes it difficult for the community to respond. Although Airservices Australia provides a wealth of data about aircraft operations, a major challenge remains for it to engage the community, develop and implement strategies that provide greater certainty and minimise the impact of aircraft noise.

Yours faithfully

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