

29 January 2010

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Ms Radcliffe

## **Re: Inquiry into the effectiveness of Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise**

The Urban Taskforce is a non-profit organisation representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers. We provide a forum for people involved in the development and planning of the urban environment to engage in constructive dialogue with both government and the community.

The Urban Taskforce has previously provided comprehensive comment to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government on the Government's paper- *Development of a National Aviation Policy Statement* and on the *National Aviation Policy Green Paper*. Our comments have mostly focused on the challenges faced by the development industry and planning authorities when considering urban development in the vicinity of Commonwealth owned airport sites. In this regard, we acknowledge the complexity of planning for airport infrastructure while recognising the need for urban growth and we argue that there are systems in place that can provide guidance and certainty to the developer and community.

The Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) is a valuable planning tool and does provide a nationally recognised starting point for land use planning decisions. The ANEF also introduces a level of certainty to land use in the vicinity of airport sites which encourages informed investment, building design and construction decisions.

However, the Urban Taskforce is concerned with the way that ANEF contours are prepared by airport operators and particularly how the current system is open to manipulation by airport operators to unnecessarily seek the serialisation of land in the vicinity of airports. The role of Airservices Australia in the approval of ANEF is vital, but recent experience brings their effectiveness into question.

Our comments focus on the importance of the ANEF system and the role that Airservices Australia should adopt when approving ANEF charts.

### **1. The ANEF system provides certainty**

The Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) system can be an effective planning tool when considering land use in the vicinity of airports. If we are able to look beyond the questionable assumptions upon which the ANEF is generated, the ANEF system does provide clarity and certainty for developers.

A developer may use the ANEF system to consider the need for specialised building elements to meet acoustic standards. With this clear knowledge the decision to invest and return on investment can be determined. **If impartially and transparently prepared, the ANEF provides clarity and certainty.**

## 2. The way that ANEF charts are generated is unreliable and open to manipulation

Aircraft noise must be properly considered and appropriate planning must be undertaken to permit development that is suited to local environmental conditions. Appropriate planning does not mean that valuable land in the vicinity of airports should have their development potential restricted by the inappropriate use of the ANEF.

Despite the benefits of using ANEF as a planning tool, the way that these contours are establishment has received attention in the Federal Court of Australia.<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that the assumptions used as the major inputs for the generation of the ANEF contours are not only variable, but also not checked by Airservices Australia as part of their endorsement process. That is, Airservices Australia's role is one that focuses on the checking of the mathematical translation of assumptions into contours. However, whether the assumptions used are valid is not the role of Airservices Australia when determining if an ANEF for an airport should be endorsed.

It is of great concern that the practice of Airservices Australia when determining whether an ANEF may be endorsed "is not to assess any of the data in a qualitative way or to seek to determine the likelihood of the assumptions behind the relevant data actually occurring".<sup>2</sup>

ANEF contour maps have the potential to dramatically impact on the development potential of land in the vicinity of an airport and we do not think that it is appropriate that the maps can be prepared by the operator of the airport, based on their forecasts of a possible future operating environment without extensive testing of assumptions and validation of predictions.

For example, operators of Canberra Airport when revising their master plan made the assumption that Canberra airport will have the same ultimate aircraft movements as Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport. Furthermore, heavier aircraft movements at noise sensitive times were factored into the assumptions. This overestimation of aircraft movements and bias to noisier aircraft at sensitive times multiplies the impacts on the ANEF charts. Essentially, unrealistic assumptions have the affect of over estimation of impact and hence land use restriction.

Surely it is plainly obvious that it is in the interest of an airport operator to overstate the future operating environment of their airport as a means of creating artificially expanded exclusion zones in their vicinity.

**The finalisation of ANEF contours, including the testing of the underlying assumptions, should not be handled by the airport operator. This should be the role of Airservices Australia.**

## 3. Airservices Australia is not a planning authority

Airservices Australia is not a planning authority and is not easily able to properly consider the local or broader regional planning issues concerning urban development. Unlike local and state governments, Airservices Australia is not accountable for land use planning decisions and for this reason it must not seek to engage in provision of land use planning advice.

Airservices Australia plays an important technical and advisory role to land use planning authorities and should focus on ensuring that the quality of information provided to the decision maker is robust, impartial and reliable.

These comments are offered to encourage constructive dialogue and we ask that you accept these comments as our contribution to this debate. We are always able to provide a development industry perspective on policy and we would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss these issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely  
**Urban Taskforce Australia**



Aaron Gadje  
Chief Executive Officer

<sup>1</sup> *The Village Building Co Limited v Airservices Australia* (2007) FCA 1242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*