



27 January 2010

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

Dear Sir or Madam,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of Airservices Australia's management of aircraft noise.

SSROC member local government areas lie directly under the flight paths of aircraft arriving and departing from Sydney Airport's international and domestic terminals. The management and abatement of aircraft noise is therefore of considerable interest to our member Councils.

The individual, economic and social impacts of aircraft noise are well documented. Studies have shown a clear link between aircraft noise and the health of residents living beneath flight paths. There are also direct consequences for local communities, including falling property values, reduced business investment and poor educational and social outcomes.

The expansion of Sydney Airport and the growth in trade and tourism sectors as well as planned urban renewal in local government areas surrounding the Airport will create further residential and employment concentration in what are already densely inhabited areas.

It is therefore vital that the government continues to closely monitor and review the actions of airports and airlines to ensure the safety and welfare of the community.

SSROC is generally supportive of the Government's proposed initiatives in relation to aircraft noise management as outlined in the National Aviation Policy White Paper, specifically the maintenance of the curfew at Sydney Airport and the supplementation of the Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) system with tools that measure noise exposure at specific locations as well as the frequency of noise exposure above certain levels. The accuracy of this information is vital to local government planning processes, but is highly technical and is difficult to translate in terms that the general public can understand.

A recurrent complaint amongst community members affected by aircraft noise is that the measurement of noise often does not reflect what discomfort they are actually experiencing.

Lvl 2, Suite 2E, Hurstville House
34 MacMahon Street
Hurstville

PO Box 536
Hurstville NSW 1481

Ph: 9330 6455

Fx: 9330 6456

Email: ssroc@ssroc.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.ssroc.nsw.gov.au

This is illustrated by the rise in complaints about aircraft noise from residents living outside conventional high noise exposure zones. Where there is no transparent link between what is described and what is experienced, consultation and complaint mechanisms – no matter how extensive - will continue to be undermined by a lack of trust between stakeholders. This is particularly the case where the community cannot see any positive outcome or change resulting from their feedback.

SSROC supports the establishment of an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman to monitor Airservices Australia's consultation arrangements and ensure that technical data is sourced from a variety of systems and is translated in terms that are relevant to planning authorities and the general public.

SSROC is concerned, however, that the role of the Ombudsman in reviewing the complaint mechanisms of airlines and airports extends only to making recommendations for improvement. Corporations are often not best placed to manage complaints with impartiality, especially when the complainants are not direct consumers of their services. In these circumstances complaints are best handled by an independent arbiter within a strong regulatory framework including sanctions. The role of the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman does not extend to this.

Furthermore, the establishment of the role of Ombudsman within Airservices Australia is of concern. The placement could give rise to the perception that he or she is lacking independence, accountability and transparency, especially when called upon to review Airservices Australia's own performance in managing complaints.

I hope these comments will be useful to you, and thank you for the opportunity to present them.

Yours faithfully,



David Lewis
General Manager
Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils