

Submission no. 15
tabled 12 June 2002.
at public hearing on
Christmas Island.
Maced. (Ferguson)

PROPOSED ENHANCEMENTS TO THE AIRPORT ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND

SUBMISSION FROM THE SHIRE OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND TO THE PARLIAMENT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

12th June 2002

SUMMARY

The Shire of Christmas Island generally supports the upgrading and enhancing of the airport, however, there are some areas of concern that we wish to raise with regard to the potential impacts of the proposal.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Shire of Christmas Island has not received any public consultation documentation or environmental report and has thus based this submission on the information contained in the Draft Christmas Island International Airport Master Plan produced on behalf of the Department of Territories and Regional Services.

DRAFT CHRISTMAS ISLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT MASTER PLAN

It is recognised that it may be argued that the Draft Christmas Island International Airport Master Plan may not be relevant in relation to these proceedings. It is, however, believed to be relevant due to it being the only detailed information available to the Shire in relation to the airport enhancement.

- The draft plan contains a large amount of useful information and data in relation to the operation of aerodromes and the legislation that normally applies. The plan, however, does not consistently explain how and whether this information will be applied to the Christmas Island airport.
- The plan contains errors, especially in relation to the scaling of the included figures.

- The plan appears to make numerous assumptions for which little or no justification is provided. No real consideration appears to have been made if these assumptions do not eventuate. The plan does not consider the compatibility of the airport with the existing and likely (near) future land uses (specifically residential) eventhough this is stated as an objective of the plan. There is no reference to the draft Christmas Island Town Planning Scheme or zoning in proximity to the airport, again, eventhough compatibility with local and regional planning objectives was stated as an objective of the plan. Potential social economic and environmental impacts do not appear to have been fully explored and the plan does not reflect consultation with all stakeholders, especially local ones.

AIRCRAFT NOISE

Noise is the most tangible impact associated with an airport. An acoustic (aircraft noise) impact study should be conducted and should include but not be limited to:

- Assessment of high dB levels (>85dB) at locations such as the hospital and residential areas that are likely to be experienced.
- Assessment of the existing and future adjacent land development and adopt worse case scenarios (eg: existing neighbouring residences with open ventilation).
- Identify any noise mitigation measures that may be conducted.
- It should be recognised that single noise events, especially loud ones, may cause nuisance (eg early morning/night).
- Tonality/pitch/intrusiveness and frequency bandwidth should be identified and assessed.
- The impact of vibration associated with the noise should be assessed.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Although noise may well be the major environmental impact, it should be recognised that it is not the only one. Environmental impacts (including social impacts), due to their complexities, are generally difficult to place in a hierarchy. Noise is an important issue that may constrain the further development of the airport but all other issues should also be considered as they may also have a significant constraining effect (eg: ecology, traffic generation, vibration (other than noise generated), pollution, social impacts, etc.).

Although the Draft Christmas Island International Airport Master Plan makes no inference, an Environmental Impact Study should be conducted to assess all the potential impacts the enhancement of the airport will create.

BIRD STRIKE HAZARD

Problems with scavenger birds such as gulls and pelicans are not currently an issue on Christmas Island. It is apparent that many of the birds on Christmas Island are large birds that appear to have slow take offs due to their size. They normally land only in higher trees because of this and when taking off drop down to build up speed. There are occurrences, though, where they land on the ground, especially in open areas (eg. airfields). Bird strikes have occurred and although the hazard may be less frequent it may be just as devastating.

It is suggested that due to the endemic nature of many of the bird species on the island specialist advice is likely to be necessary as "standard" bird harassment techniques and management, as utilised by aerodromes elsewhere, may be inappropriate/ineffective.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

What emergency services are to be provided to the airport? Apparently Christmas Island airport currently has an exemption from the requirement for emergency services. Is it likely this exemption will continue eventhough the circumstances of the airport are to change? What are the consequences if the exemption does not continue?

It is submitted that Airport Emergency Response Facility be provided for the enhanced airport including the provision for ambulance services.

FUEL STORAGE

The current aviation fuel infrastructure was shown to be somewhat lacking during the Tampa incident with the on-island stock of jet fuel getting as low as approximately 80,000 litres. The current method of importing fuel is via 20,000 litre "iso-containers", shipped to the island and transported by road, through residential areas, to the airport. This is an expensive operation that increases the cost of jet fuel on Christmas Island. Cocos (Keeling) Island imports their jet fuel in bulk via fuel tankers and discharge the fuel into

large storage fuel tanks. This accounts for the difference in price of 50 cents per litre less for jet fuel on Cocos Island.

The upgrade to the airport, we submit, should also include an upgrade to the fuel infrastructure. This would necessitate building a jet-fuel tank next to the current fuel farm at Smith Point and new pipe-work from Smith Point, utilising the current pipeline infrastructure, to Drumsite and new pipe-work from Drumsite to a fuelling facility at the airport.

The long-term benefits are considerable: cheaper jet-fuel, larger capacity to meet future demand and safer operation.

TOWN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Any development should be consistent with the Christmas Island Town Planning Scheme. There will be a need for re-zoning of the proposed sites (i.e. land component for the off-loading facility from vacant crown land to commercial; mining lease to airport, vacant crown land to road easement).

Where an amendment to the Christmas Island Town Planning Scheme is required a report justifying the proposal should be produced and should address such issues as:-

- The capability and suitability of the site for development;
- Alternative sites and strategies;
- Access roads;
- Landscaping and vegetation protection;
- Essential services such as telecommunications, power, water and sewerage;
- Land use constraints related to development in the vicinity of the Christmas Island International Airport and nearby sanitary landfill operations;
- The impact on community services such as waste collection, school buses, public transport and retail outlets.
- The impact on any adjacent mining operations; and
- Compliance with any other issues as outlined within the Town Planning Scheme.

It is highly recommended that a suitably qualified planning consultant is engaged to formulate and submit the necessary Scheme Amendment proposals.

AIRPORT MANAGEMENT

In remote areas of Western Australia it is common for the Local Government to manage and operate the airports. Has the Commonwealth considered the transfer of the airport to the Shire of Christmas Island. The Shire Council have indicated that they would support this once the upgrade has been completed. This would be also greatly assist in increasing the Shires asset base in line with the two previous Commonwealth Grants Commission recommendations of 1999 and 1995.



Andrew Smolders
President
Shire of Christmas Island

12/06/2002.