

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Committee's inquiry into the development of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan required detailed consideration not only of the Master Plan itself, but also of the legislation under which the Brisbane Airport Corporation, and other airport owners, operate.

1.2 The focus of the Committee's deliberations included the requirements under the *Airports Act 1996* for master plans and stakeholder consultation and the actual consultation undertaken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation.

1.3 The Committee considered the following major issues:

- a) the requirements of the Airports Act as they relate to the development of an airport master plan, including the purpose of airport master plans and major development plans;
- b) the consultation process required by the Airports Act;
- c) the consultation process undertaken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation in developing the Master Plan and the approval process for a draft master plan under the Act.
- d) issues in relation to runway options and the provision of information on flight paths and the role played by AirServices Australia in the preparation of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan.

The master plan process

1.4 Under Section 75 of the *Airports Act 1996*, when a company acquires or is granted an airport-lease (and a final master plan for the airport is not in force at the time of acquisition) the company must provide the Minister with a draft master plan for the airport within 12 months. The draft master plan is required, under the Act to apply for a period of 20 years and it must be updated every five years, however, the Act does not set out the specific purpose or objectives of an airport master plan.

1.5 In addition to the master plan and prior to undertaking any major development at an airport, legislation requires the provision of a major development plan to be approved by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Under the Airports Act, the definition of "major airport development" includes the construction (or extension) of a runway and the construction (or major extension) of a passenger terminal.

1.6 The legislation does not set out the purpose of a major development plan and its relationship to the master plan, but does require major development plans to specify in detail such matters as:

- a) the lessee company's objectives for the development and a detailed outline of the development;
- b) whether the development is consistent with the final master plan;
- c) the impact on noise levels and plans for managing aircraft noise; and
- d) the assessment of the environmental impacts and plans for dealing with the environmental impacts;.

1.7 The major problems identified with the master planning and related processes included:

- a) The uncertainty surrounding the primary purpose of an airport master plan and the differing views in the community about the purpose of master plans;
- b) The lack of understanding about the master planning and major development planning processes; and
- c) the significant debate amongst sections of the community about the legal status of the Brisbane Airport Master Plan.

1.8 This last matter was the subject of legal advice to a number of parties involved in the inquiry, including the Brisbane Airport Corporation, the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Committee itself.

1.9 A major development plan however, is a targeted proposal to implement a specific aspect of a master plan, for example, the construction or extension of a terminal or runway. There is a requirement at this stage of the process to undertake more detailed analysis of the environmental and social impacts of the new development. In addition to the requirement for further consultation with industry and the public, a major development plan would also be subject to an environmental impact assessment.

1.10 The Committee considers that the difficulties experienced in relation to the planning and consultation processes undertaken in relation to the Brisbane Airport Master Plan have arisen in part because of limitations in the *Airports Act 1996*. These limitations include:

- a) the lack of a statement of purpose for both an airport master plan and a major development plan;
- b) the lack of definition and information about the interrelationship between an airport master plan and a major development plan; and

c) the lack of prescriptive information regarding consultation requirements generally, and of appropriately structured processes for conducting appropriate community consultation.

1.11 The Committee notes that under the Airports Act, an airport master plan is a planning document designed to identify the options for future development at an airport. However, the Committee is concerned that the Act is silent on a purpose statement for an airport master plan - one of the major deficiencies of the Airports Act is that it does not state the precise purpose and impact of a master plan, but clearly is open to interpretation. The absence of such a statement has led to significant confusion within the community and stakeholder groups about the purpose and status of airport master plans.

Consultation under the *Airports Act 1996*

1.12 The *Airports Act 1996* sets out the requirements for public notification and consultation on the draft master plan and recognition of comments received. The Brisbane Airport Corporation undertook a number of processes to inform residents and stakeholders about the draft Master Plan, including public meetings, newspaper advertisements, the establishment of an information line and website and mobile displays.

1.13 The Brisbane Airport Corporation received over 4,000 submissions on the preliminary Draft Master Plan, principally expressing concern about noise levels. Much of the criticism centred around existing noise levels, but some criticism of the amount of information provided by the BAC and the extent to which the corporation had investigated alternate runway options was also evident.

1.14 The Committee notes the Brisbane Airport Corporation has undertaken a re-structure of its Brisbane Airport Environment Committee [BAEC] to enhance cooperation between the airport and the general community.

1.15 The Committee notes the consultation process undertaken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation with government, local industry and tourism organisations. Notwithstanding the actual consultation that took place, there was a strong community perception that the consultation with the public had been inadequate. The Committee considers that the Brisbane Airport Corporation conducted the public comment phase of the planning process in accordance with the requirements of the Airports Act. However, the Committee considers that, while minimum consultation arrangements are prescribed under the Act, there is nothing to prevent more extensive consultation from taking place.

1.16 The Committee is of the opinion that there is a community responsibility on the Brisbane Airport Corporation, as a responsible corporate citizen, to undertake meaningful consultation with the community so that affected groups and individuals can make informed judgements. The Committee does not accept that it is responsible or desirable corporate behaviour to limit consultation to the minimum required under the legislation.

1.17 The Committee considers that it would raise public faith in the BAC if the Corporation was to demonstrate willingness to go beyond the minimum legislative requirements to meaningfully consult with and consider the public as it proceeds with airport development. The Committee further notes that one of the principal deficiencies in the consultation process experienced by the local community was the failure of the BAC to advance to the community a proper, comparative analysis of the various runway options. The lack of this information (including comparative ANEF maps and draft flight paths) impacted on the community's ability to make a properly informed comment to the BAC and the Minister on the impact of the Corporation's preferred runway option.

1.18 As noted above, the Committee considered the difficulties experienced in relation to the planning and consultation processes undertaken in relation to the Brisbane Airport Master Plan have arisen in part because of limitations in the *Airports Act 1996*.

Runway options and aircraft noise

1.19 Runway options at Brisbane Airport have been the subject of ongoing investigation since planning for the new Brisbane airport commenced. Alternate runway proposals mean changes to aircraft noise patterns. Aircraft noise over built up areas is a sensitive issue and one which all airport owners and/or lessees must be mindful of, particularly where further development is anticipated. The concern expressed by residents about the Master Plan in general and the runway options in particular, underlines the importance of full consultation on development options.

1.20 The issue of aircraft noise underlines the importance of full and open public consultation of matters relating to airports and especially of runway options, which are likely to have an impact on noise patterns and noise levels.

1.21 The Committee notes the volume of evidence given to the Inquiry about noise from the existing runway and recommends that this be addressed by the Minister. A noise amelioration program, similar to that announced by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services for Sydney Airport, should be considered.

Role of AirServices Australia

1.22 There appeared to be a community perception that AirServices Australia had a conflict of interest in providing advice to the Brisbane Airport Corporation as a consultant and then having been required to advise the government on technical matters associated with the master plan. While the Committee found that there was no actual conflict of interest it remains concerned that the potential for the perception of a conflict of interest is there, given the varied nature of AirServices Australia's responsibilities under its legislation and its commercial operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

1.23 That the *Airports Act 1996* be amended to include an object and purpose statement for airport master plans.

Recommendation 2

1.24 That the *Airports Act 1996* be amended to specify the relationship a major development plan has to a master plan.

Recommendation 3

1.25 That the *Airports Act 1996* be amended to include more prescriptive requirements for community consultation by airport owners and airport-lessees.

Recommendation 4

1.26 That the Department of Transport and Regional Services develop a set of protocols which outline the requirements for community consultation in relation to airport master plans and major development plans.

Recommendation 5

1.27 That Brisbane Airport Corporation conduct more open consultation with affected groups, including community groups.

Recommendation 6

1.28 That the *Airports Act 1996* be amended to place a responsibility on airports to disclose draft flight path information prepared by AirServices Australia to the public as part of draft master plans.

Recommendation 7

1.29 That Brisbane Airport Corporation investigate different community consultation models in order to identify the various ways in which more effective community consultation can be conducted.

Recommendation 8

1.30 That the dual roles of AirServices Australia of government adviser and external consultant be critically examined to determine whether there is potential for conflict of interest.

