

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Terms of Reference

1.1 On 23 August 1999, the Senate referred the following Inquiry to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee:

The development of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan for the future construction of a western parallel runway, with particular reference to:

- (a) whether the Brisbane Airport Corporation (BAC) failed to adequately investigate all runway options, including the adequacy of the BAC's methodology for evaluating runway options, including the economic, social (for example, comparative numbers of households affected by noise), environmental, public health and public safety impacts of each;
- (b) whether the BAC failed to release flight path information to the community and, if so, why;
- (c) the role of Airservices Australia and any conflict of interest which may exist between its BAC consultancy role and its obligation to provide advice to government;
- (d) the adequacy of public consultation undertaken by the BAC; and
- (e) why the Minister for Transport and Regional Services (Mr Anderson) proceeded to endorse the BAC Master Plan.

1.2 The proposed expansion of the Brisbane Airport has been the subject of intense and controversial debate for several years. The Committee noted the significant impact of this issue on the Brisbane public, with over 4,000 submissions (86% of which were form letters) to the BAC when the Draft Master Plan was released for public comment.

1.3 During the Inquiry the Committee was provided with, and subsequently sought independent advice on the legal status of the Brisbane Airport Master Plan and its standing, once approved by the Minister.

1.4 The Committee was mindful of the need to strike a balance between the public interest of affected and potentially affected parties and the obvious necessity for expansion of the airport.

1.5 The basis for this Inquiry lies not in opposition to any particular runway option. The Inquiry was undertaken in response to the concerns expressed by a significant number of Brisbane residents in relation to the consultation process

undertaken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation in its development of the Master Plan.

1.6 In accordance with the terms of reference for the Inquiry, the Committee's primary focus has been on the legislative requirements including the consultation and processes undertaken by Brisbane Airport Corporation in relation to the Master Plan. The Inquiry necessarily included consideration of the requirements of the Airports Act in relation to master plans and consultation processes.

1.7 The Committee has also been charged with determining the adequacy, or otherwise, of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's investigation of runway options prior to the presentation, and subsequent approval, of the Master Plan. The Committee considers that it is not within the scope of its task to undertake a detailed assessment of the merits, or otherwise, of any of the specific infrastructure proposals or runway options put forward in the Master Plan. The Committee believes that a more detailed analysis of the effects of specific infrastructure proposals is a task best undertaken by experts.

1.8 The Committee notes that under the *Airports Act 1996*, any major development which is undertaken at an airport, including the construction of, or extension to a runway, requires the presentation and approval of a major development plan. Such a plan is separate from the master planning process.

1.9 The Committee notes that under the legislation, a major development plan must provide an assessment of any environmental impacts that are expected to be associated with infrastructure development. The major development plan must also provide details of the airport-lessee company's plans for ameliorating or preventing any environmental impacts.

Criticism of the Inquiry

1.10 The Committee notes that there was some criticism of the Inquiry. There were claims that it was not a valid use of Senate resources and that it was an unnecessary and politically-motivated process.

1.11 In response to those comments the Committee states that the primary purpose of parliamentary committees is to investigate matters on behalf of the Australian Parliament. It is the role and responsibility of Senate Committees to investigate and scrutinise both corporate and government behaviour for the purposes of transparency and accountability.

1.12 The work of committees provides the opportunity for interest groups, community representatives, corporations and individuals to be involved in matters of public interest. Senate Committee inquiries provide the chance for citizens to have their views heard and facilitate direct access to their elected representatives.

1.13 The Committee notes with particular concern the submission and evidence given by the industry body, Tourism Task Force Ltd, which sought to discredit the

role of the Senate in scrutinising matters of public interest. The Committee deplors such questioning of the democratic process and the criticism that the Senate's Inquiry was politically motivated. The Committee also notes that BAC promoted the use of pro-forma letters, in an attempt to forestall the Inquiry. The Committee considers that such conduct is an inappropriate attempt to influence the holding and outcome of a Senate inquiry and believes the action to have been counter-productive.

Structure of the Report

1.14 Chapter Two provides an overview of the requirements of the Airports Act as they relate to the development of an airport master plan. It examines the purpose of airport master plans and major development plans and provides clarification with regard to the legal status of the Master Plan - an issue which was of some considerable debate throughout the Inquiry.

1.15 Chapter Three outlines the consultation process required by the Airports Act and contrasts this with the consultation process undertaken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation in developing the Master Plan. It also outlines the approval process for a draft master plan under the Act.

1.16 Chapter Four canvasses a number of issues in relation to runway options and the provision of information on flight paths. It considers the types of concerns which have been raised by residents in relation to both the current and the proposed runway configurations. The chapter examines the limitations of the ANEF system as a means for measuring aircraft noise. The role played by Airservices Australia in the preparation of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan is also discussed in this chapter.

1.17 Chapter Five provides a summary of the conclusions reached by the Committee and the resulting recommendations.

