

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

5.1 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 deficiencies in the *Airports Act 1996*. These deficiencies 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.

5.2 The Committee does not question the need for additional capacity to handle aircraft movements to be developed if the airport is to meet expected demand. Such capacity is required for the airport to be capable of providing the impetus for economic development.

5.3 The major issue considered by the Committee was the quality of consultation surrounding the Draft Master Plan and the adequacy of consideration of alternative options to the western parallel runway and their impacts.

5.4 The Committee notes that a corporation which uses the minimum standard of legal requirement to set the bar for its community responsibility may not maximise public confidence and integrity. There are many responsibilities for corporate citizens that are not codified in law but which equate to good corporate practice.

5.5 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.

5.6 The Committee notes the legal advice that, should any development other than that approved in the current Master Plan be considered, a new master plan is required to be prepared and submitted for public comment, prior to seeking Ministerial approval. It is only after this process that BAC could move to the major development plan stage, including the more extensive assessment of environmental and social impacts of the proposed development.

5.7 This new opportunity to seek public comment provides BAC with scope to undertake consultation based on the provision of detailed information and transparent assessment of all runway options to interested parties and the discussion of the proposals in small community groups as outlined by the Hipwood Road Residents' group.

The Airports Act

5.8 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.

5.9 An airport master plan is a preliminary planning document for the overall development of an airport and which provides information regarding the future intentions of the airport-lessee. It should be viewed as a framework for future development and one which is flexible enough to take account of changing economic, social and development needs. The master plan should also be flexible enough to take account of changes to technology, environmental management and commercial management practices.

Recommendation 1

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

5.11 The Committee expects that following amendments to the legislation, the Minister would require, within a reasonable period of time, amended airport master plans, developed in accordance with the new requirements under the Airports Act.

Major Development Plans

5.12 The Committee notes the Minister for Transport and Regional Services' requirement that any major development plan for Brisbane Airport must fully explore alternative runway configurations, in order to provide the community with a complete and transparent process.

Recommendation 2

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

Runway options

5.14 The Committee further notes that the BAC's proposal for a staggered parallel runway is not one of the options put forward in the current Brisbane Airport Master Plan. Before such a runway option is able to be the subject of a Major Development Plan there is a requirement, under Sections 78 and 94(5) of the Act, that the proposal either be part of the existing Master Plan or not be inconsistent with the Master Plan. For a Major Development Plan on the staggered runway option to be developed the Master Plan must be amended to provide for such an option.

Aircraft noise

5.15 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.

5.16 The Committee notes that the greatest public concern expressed in much of the evidence given to the Inquiry related to potential flight paths associated with any new runway. It is clear that this public concern would be ameliorated if draft flight paths could be approximated using the placement of a runway, combined with approach rules and general wind directions, and released publicly.

5.17 The Committee notes the subsequent work by BAC on the Staggered Runway Concept and BAC's assessment that the Staggered Runway Concept will limit the noise impact on residences.

5.18 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.

Consultation

5.19 Consultation is fundamental to sound planning and decision making processes. 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. The Committee does, however, make note of the fact that, whilst the Act outlines the minimum requirements for consultation with the public, this should not prevent additional consultation being undertaken by an airport lessee.

5.20 The Committee considers that the Airports Act is not sufficiently prescriptive in its requirements in relation to the issue of public consultation.

5.21 The Committee notes the relatively extensive consultation process undertaken by BAC with government, local industry and tourism organisations. Notwithstanding the actual consultation that took place, there was a community perception that the consultation had been inadequate. This perception seems to have arisen as a result of the lack of publicly available information, such as that relating to flight paths. The Committee is of the view that BAC could have undertaken its consultation with community groups more effectively and where information has not been provided or is unable to be provided the Corporation should advise of the reasons why such information is not able to be provided.

ALP Senators' View

5.22 ALP Senators consider that the Brisbane Airport Corporation did not conduct a proper public comment phase of the planning process. ALP Senators are strongly of the opinion that there is a wider responsibility on the BAC as a responsible corporate citizen which stands to profit significantly from any Brisbane Airport expansion, to hold meaningful consultation with the community so that affected groups and individuals can make informed judgement.

5.23 ALP Senators do not accept that it is responsible or desirable corporate behaviour to limit consultation to the minimum required under legislation, particularly when that legislation appears clearly deficient in the area of specifying explicitly consultation requirements.

5.24 In this context, ALP Senators consider that the BAC should have allowed for a more open consultation process, once it became apparent that interested groups were not completely informed.

Recommendation 3

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

Recommendation 4

5.26 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

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

Recommendation 6

5.28 That the *Airports Act* 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

5.29 That BAC investigate different community consultation models in order to identify the various ways in which more effective community consultation can be conducted.

Ministerial Approval of the Master Plan

5.30 Under the Airports Act, the Minister has the choice to either approve or not approve an airport master plan. The Committee is satisfied that the Minister's approval of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan was in accordance with the Act.

ALP Senators' View

5.31 ALP Senators consider that the Minister's approval of the Brisbane Airport Corporation's Master Plan was based on deficiencies in the Act, (for example in the provision of draft flight plan information) as well as deficiencies in the public consultation process.

Role of Airservices Australia

5.32 The Committee is concerned that Airservices Australia's dual roles of government advisor and external consultant has potential for a conflict of interest. Even the perception of such a conflict could lead to an erosion of trust within the community for a Government body charged with the provision of impartial advice to the Minister.

Recommendation 8

5.33 That the dual roles of Airservices Australia of government advisor and external consultant be critically examined to determine whether there is potential for conflict of interest.

Senator John Woodley

Chairman

