

Additional Comments by Government Senators

This Senate Committee inquiry arose out of concerns with Airservices' management of aircraft noise and consultation during the Western Australian Route Review Program (WARRP).

Government Senators note that this report is broadly in line with the policies in the Government's December 2009 Aviation White Paper, and where there are policy problems they are in relation to decisions by the Howard Government.

Many of the issues raised by non-Government Senators about WARRP relate to decisions taken under the Howard Government. For example:

- The process of reviewing the safety of flight paths near Perth Airport and throughout Western Australia commenced in 2003 under the previous Government, using a consultation process established by the previous Government, and.
- The decision that WARRP would not have a significant environmental impact, and did not trigger the need for wider assessment and consultation was taken in 2007 by the Howard Government (refer to paragraphs 4.30-4.35 and Recommendations 9 and 10 of this Report).

Government Senators share the criticisms made by Liberal and National Party Senators of consultation processes employed under the Howard Government. Consultation should have been more direct with the community.

Government Senators agree that the consultation undertaken by Airservices during WARRP (2006 – 2008) should have been more directly with residents, as well as through the Perth Airport Noise Management Consultative Committee.

Government Senators are concerned that although the consultation should have been better, those who were part of the consultation process also should have been more diligent.

Government Senators note the Consultative Committee used during WARRP had representatives from all three levels of Government (including the Member for Pearce, Judi Moylan MP), community groups and airlines.

The records of the Consultative Committee show that the Member for Pearce was invited to eight meetings of the Consultative Committee, but did not attend any of them – preferring instead to send apologies to seven meetings, and a staff member from her electorate office to three of those meetings.

Government Senators note that the implementation of a number of important measures outlined in the Government's Aviation White Paper will improve aircraft noise

management at our major airports. These have already been noted in Chapter 2 of this Report.

Importantly, improving the quality and accessibility of noise information for communities near airports was an important part of the Aviation White Paper. Measures being taken by the current Government include the establishment of an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman to independently review noise complaint handling and to improve Airservices' consultation arrangements.

The establishment of an independent Aircraft Noise Ombudsman demonstrates the importance the current Government places on improving the relationship between the industry, airports and their surrounding communities.

Government Senators note that Recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 6 appear broadly consistent with Government policy, as set out in Chapter 14 of the Aviation White Paper.

While not necessarily disagreeing with other Committee Recommendations, Government Senators are concerned that the costs, duplication and bureaucracy associated with some of the Recommendations could be significant. In particular:

- **Recommendation 2** – Noting there are about 180 airports in Australia that receive scheduled passenger services, the Recommendation proposes an unclear and potentially very expensive program of Community Advocates. The proposed Community Advocates would have an unclear role which may cut across established consultation processes, and may lead to situations where an unelected and unaccountable person could conflict with sections of the community and/or democratically elected representatives.

Given MPs and local councillors are elected as community representatives and advocates, it would be more logical and responsible to improve training for MP's, local councillors and their staff in relation to airport and flight paths issues, and to employ technical assistance if and when needed to supplement the work done by Airservices.

- **Recommendation 7** – This Recommendation is ill-conceived and would create a legalistic and bureaucratic process that would be second guessing the business plans of airport operators.

ANEF's are built on long-term scenarios of aviation growth (which could be forecasting up to 50 years in the future) and are used as a tool for land use planning near airports. The Recommendation, if implemented, could lead to an expensive and inconclusive debate between duelling experts, property developers and planning authorities.

It is worth remembering that the Commonwealth, airport lessees and the whole community of the region where the airport is located all have an interest in conservative planning around airports that protects the operational capacity of the airport and the amenity of residential areas.

Senator Glenn Sterle

Senator Kerry O'Brien

