



**RAAA Response To**  
**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,**  
**Regional Development and Local Government**

## **Discussion Paper**

# **Safeguards For Airports and the Communities Around Them**

**July 2009**

*Serving regional aviation, and through it, the people and businesses of regional Australia*

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## The RAAA and its Members

The Regional Aviation Association of Australia (RAAA) was formed in 1980 as the Regional Airlines Association of Australia to protect, represent and promote the combined interests of its regional airline members and regional aviation throughout Australia.

The Association changed its name in July 2001 to the Regional Aviation Association of Australia and widened its charter to include a range of membership, including regional airlines, charter and aerial work operators, and the businesses that support them.

The RAAA has 24 Ordinary Members (AOC holders) and 47 Associate/Affiliate Members. The RAAA's AOC members directly employ over 2,500 Australians, many in regional areas. On an annual basis, the RAAA's AOC members jointly turnover more than \$1b, carry well in excess of 2 million passengers and move over 23 million kilograms of freight .

RAAA members operate in all States and Territories and include airlines, airports, engineering and flight training companies, finance and insurance companies and government entities. Many of RAAA's members operate successful and growing businesses providing employment and economic sustainability within regional areas.

Some examples of RAAA members' presence in regional Australia is the REX hub in Wagga Wagga, Sharp Aviation in Hamilton, Kimberley Aviation at Broome, Airnorth's Northern Territory network, West Wing Aviation in Mt Isa and Skytrans operations from Cairns, to name a few.

Many of the fly in/fly out operations for the mining sector are flown by RAAA members. These members are providing a vital service to an industry sector that still underpins the Australian economy.

Members such as Basair, Sharp Aviation, Rex and Brindabella Airlines have established flying schools to cater for increasing demand for commercial pilots. Other members, such as Aviation Australia and Alliance Airlines have first-rate apprenticeship programmes and are continuously developing their engineering training courses to ensure that their new engineers receive up to the minute training.

## **RAAA Charter**

The RAAA's Charter is to promote a safe and viable regional aviation industry. To meet this goal the RAAA:

- promotes the regional aviation industry and its benefits to Australian transport, tourism and the economy among government and regulatory policy makers;
- lobbies on behalf of the regional aviation industry and its members;
- contributes to government and regulatory authority policy processes and formulation to enable its members to have input into policies and decisions that may affect their businesses;
- encourages high standards of professional conduct by its members; and
- provides a forum for formal and informal professional development and information sharing.

The RAAA provides wide representation for the regional aviation industry by direct lobbying of Ministers and senior officials, through parliamentary submissions, personal contact and by ongoing, active participation in a number of consultative forums.

## ISSUES

Airports are important transport infrastructure assets that should be used primarily for commercial and private aviation activities. Airport designers and surveyors usually envisage around a 50 year utilisation. They attempt to design a safe and efficient airfield that will serve the needs of aircraft, the travelling public and mitigate as much as possible any negative impacts on the surrounding community through a series of buffer zones. Successful airfield design is a complex task that attempts to strike a balance between aviation needs and the community that the airfield serves.

Since the privatisation of the major airports most new owners have tended to see the airfield as commercial land to be exploited fully. While this approach may be reasonable contractually it can mean that airfield land is used for purposes for which it was never intended or designed. An example is the rapid expansion of commercial buildings at Canberra Airport to the immediate west of Runway 35 and the permanent Notam issued warning of turbulence at the touchdown point. The wisdom of the previous government's privatisation of the major airports is very problematic but it is a decision with which the whole aviation industry now must contend.

Not only must unsuitable commercial development on airfields be constrained and regulated careful attention must be given to housing and commercial developments near to the airfield. In most instances the housing developments are approved long after the airfield is operational and yet the aviation activity becomes the focus of the new residents' complaints. There is a long standing legal principle of 'coming to the nuisance' that covers this issue. If you build or buy a house close to an airport you are deemed to have done so with full knowledge and you should not expect any special treatment from the courts, that is, you have 'come to the nuisance'.

It is timely to be making a stand in support of airfields large and small. Once closed, they are lost forever. A case in point is Hoxton Park which eased training traffic congestion at Bankstown and provided another runway option in case of adverse wind conditions. With the loss of Hoxton Park and the nth-sth runway at Bankstown there are now no 18-36 GA runways in the Sydney basin which means difficult, even dangerous cross wind landings for many light aircraft. This situation, ie the closure of Hoxton Park, should never have been allowed in the contract of sale. The policy was developed in haste and operators are forced to repent at leisure.

Clarity of planning both on the airfield and near to the airfield needs urgent attention. One SA council allowed houses to be built between runways and then has spent countless hours responding to noise complaints from residents. In the USA an innovative approach is the development of residential airparks in which housing is approved on or near airfields for residents who are interested in aviation. You have happy ratepayers who provide an income-earning buffer zone between the airfield and the general population. This concept is slowly catching on in this country and has excellent potential if supported by all levels of government.

The hasty privatisation of many airports means that the industry and government regulators are trying to react as airport owners attempt to extract the maximum profit for their investors. Unfortunately large monopoly infrastructure in private hands can prove questionable. You only have to look at the results of the power industry privatisation in Victoria and SA to see how fraught this policy can become. If airport privatisation is here to stay, on and near airport development particularly near the runway approaches, needs to be covered by carefully thought through planning laws. To be frank this is the reverse of the hasty, ill-conceived airport privatisation policy.

High quality planning policy is the key to the protection and development of Australia's airport aviation assets. All commercial operators rely on sound airport infrastructure. Any threat to this standard will have a direct impact on the ability of operators to grow their businesses and employ more Australians.

The RAAA made extensive comment relating to the above matters in its responses to the government's Aviation Discussion and Green Papers. These responses are held by the Dept of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

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