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23 June 2008

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Government
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir / Madam

Please find enclosed a submission from the District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula in response to the April 2008 Issues Paper – towards a National Aviation Policy Statement.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some input into this process.

Yours faithfully

PETER AIRD
AIRPORT MANAGER

Cc Ken Keech



**DISTRICT COUNCIL OF LOWER EYRE PENINSULA
NATIONAL AVIATION INDUSTRY POLICY
Response to issues Paper - June 2008**

Introduction

The District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula owns and operates the Port Lincoln Airport located on Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. The Port Lincoln Airport is a critical piece of transport infrastructure for the region with a catchment population of 26,000 spread across 6 local government areas. The airport facilitates the movement of 150,000 passengers per annum in addition to significant general aviation movements for charter, freight, private and recreational activities.

Council congratulates the Minister on the initiative to develop a National Aviation Industry Policy and appreciates the opportunity to provide the following submission in response to the April 2008 Issues Paper.

Regional and general aviation

Air services to areas such as Eyre Peninsula are critical to the well being of regional communities and their ability to function as efficient and productive contributors to the national economy.

The provision of regional airport infrastructure is clearly an important part of ensuring regional air services are able to operate. With relatively low numbers of users to meet the cost it frequently means the unit charges per passenger are high and or that regional communities are forced to subsidise the infrastructure costs over and above the amount able to be collected from user charges. These factors apply pressure to the viability of such air services and need to be recognised in any government policy.

Government policy needs to recognise that in the area of security a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. Security requirements for regional airports need to be assessed on a location specific risk based approach to ensure that appropriate levels of security are in place, while at the same time maximising the opportunities for air services to operate in a cost effective and sustainable manner.

Addressing skills needs in the aviation industry

Port Lincoln Airport, like most regional airports, is reliant on specialist consultants to provide expert advice and assistance on a range of technical issues. The majority of these consultants gained much of their experience and expertise in the employ of the Commonwealth Government prior to the transition to local and private ownership of airports across the country. This pool of people are fast approaching or past retirement age and very few of them appear to have established businesses where a new generation of people are being employed, trained and given the experience that the airport industry will require in years to come.

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Locally owned regional airports are unable to provide an environment where the next generation of these specialists can be employed, trained and mentored to cater for future needs.

Government should explore ways to foster and encourage employment and training of new people in the specialised airport related disciplines. This should be done with a view to developing a cooperative approach by airport owners and private consultants as a matter of urgency to ensure that the knowledge available today is not lost forever.

The mining boom being experienced in much of regional Australia is adding to the difficulties in the area of skills shortages with both consultants and employees being attracted by the financial rewards on offer that local airport owners are unable to compete with.

Airport planning and development

Planning controls available by way of South Australian legislation appear to provide limited means for a regional airport owner to protect an airport against inappropriate development, unless the owner is a Local Government Authority and the development area is within the boundaries of that Authority. Such inappropriate development could include incompatible land uses in the vicinity of an airport or structures infringing an OLS. Consideration needs to be given to some legislative mechanism to enable an airport to have a measure of control over inappropriate developments where such developments have the potential to limit the capacity of the airport to operate.

There are also a number of activities that are not regulated by the South Australian development legislation that have the potential to have an impact on the operation of a regional airport such as Port Lincoln. For instance the planting of trees on private land in the vicinity of an airport can have serious consequences by way of OLS infringements. Such activity is not controlled by development legislation and could have the potential to render some airports unusable.

Aviation security

Port Lincoln airport is in discussion with a potential carrier to introduce a jet RPT service. One of the most significant issues facing the airport would be the need for passenger and check bag screening if such a service was to become a reality under the present requirements.

The recurrent cost of screening, combined with the high capital cost of related terminal infrastructure upgrading, have the potential to stifle such a service and the benefits it could bring to the region.

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If passenger screening or check bag screening is required at regional airports consideration should be given to delivery of the service on some form of subsidised basis such as an industry wide pricing arrangement. This would ensure that the costs of security for the benefit of the broader community could be shared in an equitable manner without adding unduly to the already disproportionate burden on regional communities.

Summary

The District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula encourages the Government to develop aviation policy that recognises:

- The significant cost impositions that are currently being met by many regional communities to retain the vital transport links provided by regional aviation.
- The importance and value of a comprehensive and sustainable network of regional aviation services to the whole of Australia.
- The need to develop new and innovative approaches to regional aviation issues, particularly in the area of security.
- The wider benefits that can be obtained from some proactive Government support for the regional aviation industry.