

**Kelvin Thomson MP**  
**Federal Member for Wills**

*Submission to the Development of  
a National Aviation Policy  
Statement Review*

Department of Infrastructure,  
Transport, Regional Development  
and Local Government

May 2008

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**1. Overview**

A *White Paper for Australia's Aviation Future* was released on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2008 by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, The Hon Anthony Albanese MP.

The aim of the *White Paper* is to provide greater investment certainty for the aviation industry as well as address the wider community and environmental impacts associated with air transport and airport development.

The Government has asked all those with an interest in the future of the Australian aviation industry to consider the questions posed by the Issues Paper and to respond.

Issues raised in the Issues Paper include aviation security, aviation safety, skills shortages, issues arising from secondary airports, promoting dialogue between communities and airports, tackling climate change and improving arrangements for Air Services Australia and CASA (Albanese 2008).

I am making this submission in relation to Essendon Airport, which is located within my electorate. As this review aims to investigate future policy for Australia's aviation future, I am making this submission to propose that aviation policy incorporates the phasing out and relocation of aircraft from Essendon Airport.

Essendon Airport (2008) was established in the 1920s. It was Melbourne's main airport until the opening of Tullamarine Airport in 1970, which saw international flights relocated, followed by domestic flights in 1971.

It was initially established after the Federal Government bought 36.8 hectares of land, then known as St Johns, for aviation activities. Another 36.5ha was added 14 years later, notably part of Bulla Road and an area to the west in Keilor in 1938.

The Airport's first tenant was J H Larkin in December 1921. It was used by many aviation pioneers and welcomed many international visitors and distinguished guests (Carman 2001).

Essendon Airport (2008) was also used as a defence facility during the Second World War.

In 1996 the Federal Department of Transport recommended Essendon Airport's closure. But the then Transport Minister, The Hon John Sharp MP, determined that the Airport would stay open and that it would be sold to private operators (Carman 2001).

In 1998 Essendon Airport Pty Ltd (EAPL) (2007:14) was granted a 50 year lease with a 49 year option. Control of Essendon Airport Pty Ltd was transferred to a joint venture of the Linfox and Becton Groups in September 2001. In 2005, the Becton Group transferred its interest to Beck Corporation.

The joint venture company paid A\$22 million for the lease of the 305 hectare site, which is located only 14 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD. This lease specifically requires EAPL to continue operating the facility as an airport, while also undertaking commercial development (Carman 2001).

The Lease Agreement between the Commonwealth and EAPL states that throughout the term of the lease, the Lessee must develop the Airport Site at its own cost and expense, having regard to the actual and anticipated future growth in traffic demand for the Airport site (Commonwealth 1998:12)

The previous Federal Government imposed this Agreement upon the local community without any consultation. Had public feedback been sought, the Government would have known that the strong majority of residents want aviation activities to be relocated.

In accordance with the *Airport Act 1996*, EAPL (2007) released its *Draft Master Plan* for the next five years in November 2007. The *Act* requires all airports to put forward a *Draft Master Plan* to set out management's intentions for the airport for the next five years.

Proposals put forward in this *Draft Master Plan* indicate an intensification of aircraft activity over the next five years. These proposals include constructing up to thirteen new hangars, a light aircraft parking apron for up to 70 aircraft, discussion of a new control tower and the upgrading of the existing terminal building. This is out of step with the views of the local community.

I have made a joint submission with the Victorian State Member for Essendon, Mrs Judy Maddigan MP, in response to the *Draft Master Plan*. Our submission discusses the issues associated with intensifying aviation activity and makes eleven recommendations the EAPL is encouraged to implement. I have enclosed a copy of the joint submission and resident correspondence for your information.

The site is well past its use by date as an Airport. The proposals in its recent *Draft Master Plan* to intensify aviation activity are out of step with both the local community's wishes and the changes which have happened and continue to happen both on and off the site.

## 2. Executive Summary

Aviation policy in Australia must take into account the phasing out and relocation of aircraft from Essendon Airport, with a view to permanently ceasing aircraft activity at the Airport.

I believe Essendon Airport is past its use by date as an Airport and I have discussed this in my joint submission with Mrs Judy Maddigan MP, the State Member for Essendon, in response to EAPL's recent *Draft Master Plan*.

The discussion questions raised in the issues paper for the review relating to community safety, promoting dialogue between airports and communities, tackling climate change, airport regulations and noise, are all issues that relate directly to Essendon Airport.

Essendon Airport is surrounded by built up, long established residential communities from all sides and flight approaches and take offs. It has a history, which is discussed in detail in Section 3.1 of this submission, of aircraft accidents, in particular light aircraft, which have claimed lives. In order to achieve optimum safety for communities neighbouring airports, the relocation of aircraft should commence.

This could begin by EAPL putting forward proposals in their *Draft Master Plan* to begin dismantling existing aviation infrastructure. No further plans to construct new aviation oriented buildings should occur.

This review should investigate options for other airports to absorb aircraft that currently access Essendon. Section 3.6 of this submission discusses the options available for Single, Twin Piston and jet aircraft being phased out and relocated to other airports.

The joint submission puts forward a number of recommendations that are encouraged to be implemented to minimise disturbances for the local community in the interim, in particular minimising noise.

They include the existing curfew to be enforced, with no exemptions, between the hours of 11pm and 6am, no changes to existing weight limitations on aircraft accessing Essendon Airport occurring, the adoption of 'fly neighbourly' flight paths for helicopters at Essendon similar to the paths that are in place throughout Australia's National Parks, and also the possibility of emergency service helicopters being located at the state's major hospital helipads during the curfew period.

This review should also consider the issues raised by my constituents in relation to air quality, and the impact that intensified aviation activity is having on it. There are a number of studies I discuss in Section 3.3 of the submission which raise concern over the effect aircraft fumes have on air quality for neighbouring communities.

There are also net benefits to the economy as a whole resulting from closing Essendon Airport (Ambidji Group 2000:5), that I discuss in Section 4.

I encourage this review to investigate and consider the phasing out and relocation of aircraft from Essendon Airport. A future aviation policy statement must be modern to ensure our national economic growth continues, but it must

also be formed through extensive community consultation. My constituents are opposed to the proposals put forward in EAPL's recent *Draft Master Plan* to intensify aviation activity and wish to see the Airport commence the phasing out of aircraft and decline in aviation operations.

### **3. Challenges raised by Issues Paper**

The Issues Paper identifies a broad range of challenges, including:

- Achieving an international air services policy which serves our national interest and balances the needs of an Australian based industry with international competitiveness.
- Ensuring that aviation security is maintained as the highest priority in an era where planes and airports are still potential terrorist targets.
- Making the safety of all planes and airports the highest priority for operators and ensuring safety regulations are both robust and efficient.
- Addressing the shortage of pilots, aircraft engineers and air-traffic controllers.
- Planning for the issues arising from the growth of low cost carriers, such as the increased passenger numbers at secondary airports.
- Dealing with planning issues around airports in an integrated, considered way - rather than in an ad-hoc fashion.
- Promoting a proper dialogue between airports and the communities around them.
- Giving proper consideration to the importance of air freight to regional businesses, our export industries and our economic performance.
- Tackling climate change, a focal point of transport policy for this and future generations.
- Ensuring access to regular air services in regional and remote areas, where regular flights are essential for communities, regional development and social services.
- Using satellite technology to better plan flight routes – potentially saving flight time, reducing emissions and improving safety.
- Improving the governance arrangements for CASA and AirServices Australia to improve their relationships with industry and the community.
- Ensuring that a vibrant general aviation industry is able to prosper as the nurturing ground for future commercial pilots and aviation workers (Albanese 2008)

The issues paper states investment at airports must continue to meet the needs of a growing aviation industry, while also allowing for proper consideration of developments and appropriate recognition of the impacts on local communities (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:iv)

My submission focuses on the issues associated with Essendon Airport. They will include matters raised in the Issues Paper such as resident safety, promoting dialogue between the airport and local community, air quality, the curfew, weight limitations, noise and the process to re-locate aircraft.

### **3.1 Making the safety of all planes and airports the highest priority**

The Issues Paper states the tragic fatal airline accident in Lockhart River in 2005 provides a reminder to the Government, aviation industry and the community of the need to remain focussed on maintaining and improving aviation safety (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:16).

Ensuring safety at airports across the country is maintained to the highest possible standard, is of the utmost importance. This is particularly the case at Essendon Airport, due to not only its history of accidents but also because of the extremely close vicinity of homes to the Airport's runways, flight paths and aircraft infrastructure.

Essendon Airport is surrounded on all sides by heavily developed residential areas. Aircraft taking off and landing from both the North-South and East West Runways fly close to homes under these flight paths. A map that illustrates the closeness of homes to the Airport, with back fences literally bordering onto the site, is contained in the *Draft Master Plan* (EAPL 2007:18). Feedback received from residents during the *Draft Master Plan* public comment process also demonstrates just how close aircraft fly over homes when accessing the Airport.

The accidents and incidents that have occurred over the years at Essendon remind us of the need to ensure resident safety is the first priority when planning the future of the Airport. Essendon has inadequate safety buffer zones to give aircraft runoff space from runways in the event of an emergency.

The worst accident associated with the Airport occurred on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1978, when a Partenavia aircraft became airborne from the North South Runway and climbed to a height of 200 to 250 feet. Co-incident with the raising of the wing flaps from take off position and a simulated failure of one engine, the aircraft assumed a nose down attitude and continued straight ahead on a descending flight path (Department of Transport 1979:1).

The aircraft crashed into houses 286 metres beyond the western end of the Runway. Six people of an entire family on the ground were killed, one person received minor injuries. The aircraft was destroyed and the three plane occupants were seriously injured (Department of Transport 1979:1 & Carman 2001).

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1986 six people died when an air ambulance (Cessna 402) crashed after taking off from Essendon Airport (Air Ambulance- accessed 2008). Five of the dead were patients. The flight was intended to return patients to their home area following medical treatment in Melbourne. In response to a query from the Airport's control tower, the pilot advised that the left engine had failed, that he was "feathering the propeller" and would return for landing.

The twin engine Cessna then plunged into a suburban field and burst into flames only minutes after taking off from the Airport. The plane lost power after climbing to about 160 metres, then crashed to the ground less than 20 metres from power

lines. The pilot appeared to veer to avoid the 220,000 volt transmission lines in an attempt to land safely.

The plane slammed into the ground belly first, then bounced 10 metres before bursting into flames. It crashed in an agistment paddock about 300 metres east of the Tullamarine Freeway and about 300 metres short of houses in Gladstone Park (Attorney General's Department 2006).

The land to the immediate north of Essendon Airport where the crash happened has since been heavily residentially developed, and is known as Gowanbrae.

Another serious crash occurred in December 1993 when a Hawker Air de Havilland struck power lines just after take-off on a scenic flight and then hit the roofs of four adjoining houses in one street before diving into the front yard of the next house (Carmen 2001).

There have been various other accidents and incidents throughout the lifetime of the airport. Civil Aviation Authority data shows that more than 200 infringements were issued in the last two years to aviators across the country, almost 400 since 2001, in relation to breaches of airworthiness directives and flying without proper maintenance checks. Most of these related to small aircraft, with major airlines only having received four (Masanauskas 2008).

Of the 381 air safety infringements issued by CASA, 174 involved breaches regarding small passenger aircraft, 105 related to personal recreation and 38 involving passenger conduct (Masanauskas 2008).

In March 2008 up to 3000 light aircraft were recalled and grounded around the country, including at Essendon Airport, because of risk of crash landing. This was due to potential fuel injection problems to all piston-engine planes, a problem which has recently caused 18 engine failures and one crash landing in the US (Bennett 2008).

An Australian Safety Bureau report shows the average age of Australia's piston engine small aircraft fleet rose by up to 10 years in the decade from 1995 (Creedy 2007A). The average age in this category in 2005 was 31 years (Creedy 2007). According to EAPL (2007:44) 42.2% of annual aircraft movements are made up of are single piston flights and 18.4% are made up of twin piston.

The Australian Safety Bureau has warned this could mean some planes were no longer supported by the companies that manufactured them. The operators of these types of aircraft often operate with low profit margins that limit their capacity to acquire new or newer aircraft. Operators are therefore left with the option of maintaining ageing aircraft with only limited continuing airworthiness support from the manufacturer (Creedy 2007).

Despite the average age of this type of aircraft increasing, private pilots have been lobbying the aviation regulator to relax maintenance requirements for light aircraft. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association is concerned the increases in feed and the introduction of the GST has harmed the industry's ability to buy parts, and is investigating ways to reduce unnecessary regulatory and maintenance requirements. They argue each pilot of their own aircraft with training should be able to 'self-maintain wherever possible' (Creedy 2007A).

This is of concern given the record light aircraft have not only at Essendon Airport, but across the country. Last year a pilot of a twin-engine Commanche aircraft was killed when it plunged into the sea off Northern NSW after what was reportedly a double engine failure. Two men were also seriously injured last year when their Cirrus SR22 light aircraft crashed in a paddock next to the M7 motorway in western Sydney after sending an emergency message (Creedy 2007A).

On December 10 2007 a Cessna Aircraft entered the North-South Runway at Essendon Airport, without an air traffic control clearance. At that time a Piper Aircraft was on final approach and had been cleared to land on the same Runway. In order to maintain separation between the two aircraft, the control tower sent the Piper around because of the unauthorised entry by the Cessna onto the runway (Transport Safety Bureau 2008).

To ensure that safety is of the highest priority for the community surrounding Essendon Airport, aircraft should be relocated. I have made the following recommendations in my submission to the Essendon Airport *Draft Master Plan*;

**Recommendation 3:** Single and Twin Piston aircraft to be phased out and relocated to other airports.

**Recommendation 4:** Jet aircraft should be phased out from Essendon and relocated to Tullamarine and Avalon. In the interim, jet aircraft movements should be capped at existing rates.

**Recommendation 8:** An alternative long term permanent base for Emergency Service Helicopters and aircraft should be sought.

### **3.2 Promoting a dialogue between Airports and the communities around them**

The Issues Paper discusses what mechanisms might be used to ensure an effective ongoing dialogue between airport operators and their local communities (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:11).

In Essendon Airport's case, it is vital that local community views are acknowledged to given how close many reside to the Airport. To his credit, the General Manager of Essendon Airport, Mr Tim Anderson, has made himself freely available to discuss issues with local residents.

Public debate about the Airport had been occurring before the release of the recent *Draft Master Plan*. Last year I arranged two public meetings with Essendon Airport Management and local residents.

The first meeting was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at Boeing Reserve, Strathmore. This meeting was attended by approximately 120 local residents. Issues raised by local residents included helicopter and fixed wing aircraft flight paths, the curfew, noise generated from the Airport and the types of developments that were being undertaken by EAPL. Please see Appendix 3 for a copy of the minutes from this meeting.

The second community meeting was held on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2007 at the Essendon Airport Terminal. This meeting reported back on the issues raised during the first meeting. Please see Appendix 4 for a copy of the minutes from this meeting.

During these two public meetings, Essendon Airport management were made aware of resident views. Besides having aircraft re-located, the consensus from residents was that in the interim more effective curfew measures and flight paths need to be adopted by helicopters to minimise noise and disturbances. More community oriented developments should take place on the airport.

Overall ongoing consultation with the local community must be considered. Currently local communities not just in my electorate, but those that reside near an Airport across the country, only have a fixed formal period of a few months every five years during the *Draft Master Plan* process for their feedback to be considered.

I believe a more flexible approach should be implemented which allows for ongoing consultation on a regular basis, and allows community feedback to be considered and reviewed throughout the life of a *Master Plan*. This will allow for communities to play a more proactive role in articulating their views as Master Plans and airport management plans evolve.

For example, the Essendon Airport *Draft Master Plan* outlines various projects it would like to undertake in particular parcels of its land. These range from light commercial, retail, and an aged care facility. No specific locations in terms of how far these projects will be located from residential back fences that border the Airport are specified, nor are any proposals on how access to these developments, some of which are to be located in what are referred to as "land locked areas", due to aviation infrastructure, specified.

Allowing for ongoing formal consultation to occur as further detail emerges of a *Master Plan*, will then allow for community feedback to be considered in the process.

Local communities and airports should have an ongoing period of formal dialogue and feedback during the five year period of a *Master Plan* & public consultation processes in relation to *Draft Master Plans* should not commence and run over extended holiday periods. The following recommendations were made in response to the Essendon Airport *Draft Master Plan*;

**Recommendation 10:** Minimum buffer zones between residential back fences and future commercial developments to be proposed.

**Recommendation 11:** Public comment process to be extended by at least 1 more month.

### 3.3 Air Quality

The Issues Paper states greenhouse gas emissions from aircraft engines are the subject of significant public attention in response to the forecast growth in air traffic, scientific evidence about the impact of climate change and escalating community concern. The Paper poses the question of what practical steps can be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:20).

EAPL's (2007:35) Environment Strategy outlined in its *Draft Master Plan* predominantly takes into consideration the impact of construction on the site on

air quality and on water runoff into local waterways, including Moonee Ponds Creek.

The *Draft Master Plan* fails to consider the impact aircraft fumes have on air quality and on resident health. Many residents believe increases in fuel residue from the Airport could be affecting their health (Brown 2008). There has been a great deal of feedback regarding this issue, which is incorporated in my attached submission to the *Draft Master Plan*.

Many residents who have contacted me believe there is a correlation between the intensification of aviation activities towards the northern end of the North-South Runway and the increase in noise and fumes. Residents living in the immediate vicinity of the Airport have experienced an increase in fuel residue drifting from the Airport into their homes, and fear that it could be negatively affecting their health (Brown 2008).

At present, Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions and particulate matter (PM) are deemed to be the principal aircraft pollutants for local air quality worldwide. Along with motor vehicle traffic around airports, aircraft exhaust fumes and emissions from ground service equipment and auxiliary power units appear to be the major contributors (Green Skies 2007).

According to the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (2002) most emissions that take place during aircraft flight do not directly expose humans to pollutants as the aircraft move in higher parts of the atmosphere. However there is pollution at ground level during take off, which residents in Strathmore raise concern about. Landing and ground running results in high concentrations of harmful gases and fine particles around airports.

According to a recent assessment by the European Commission, high concentration levels of particulate matter led to approximately 288 000 premature deaths in 2000 in the EU. In the same year high particulate matter levels were also found to have caused 83 000 serious cases of hospital admissions and 25 million respiratory medication use days (Green Skies 2007).

A Senate Inquiry in 2000 found exposure to fumes of lubricant oils used in small planes, caused health problems such as headaches, vomiting, breathing problems and even partial paralysis (ABC 2000).

Current regulations are unclear as to which body is responsible for monitoring and responding to complaints regarding aircraft fumes at Essendon Airport.

The Airports (Environment Protection Regulations (Cth) set out standards for air quality in Part 1 of Schedule 1, and these apply at Essendon Airport. The Air Navigation (Aircraft Engine Emissions) Regulations (Cth) have effect of applying the emission standards set out in volume 2 of Annex 16 to the Chicago Convention to aircraft operating to or from Essendon. These standards are not administered by the Environment Protection Authority.

A future aviation policy should consider a single body to monitor and respond to air quality complaints at Essendon Airport and other federally leased Airports.

With proposed intensification of aviation activity at Essendon Airport, residents may also be faced with an increased risk of aircraft fumes negatively affecting

their health. I have made the following recommendation in my submission to the *Draft Master Plan*.

**Recommendation 9:** The Minister commission an environmental and health impact study from the Department of Transport and the EPA, on aircraft fumes and their impact on resident health and the local environment if aircraft remain at the Airport.

### **3.4 Curfew and weight limitations**

As development around airports proceeds and as aviation operations continue to grow, the Issues Paper states there will inevitably be calls for new curfews or other limitations on night time operations. Alternatives to curfews could be considered, such as tighter restrictions on the operation of noisier, marginally compliant aircraft types at certain Airports (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:12).

Aircraft movements are not permitted at Essendon Airport between the hours of 11pm and 6am, except for propeller-driven aircraft with a maximum take off weight (MTOW) not exceeding 8,618 kilograms, unless the specific aircraft or aircraft type has been included in a Prohibited Aircraft Schedule.

Exception is also granted to propeller driven aircraft with a MTOW exceeding 8,618 kilograms that have noise emissions which do not exceed 90 EPNdB on take off and 95 EPNdB on approach.

Helicopters that comply with relevant noise levels, aircraft involved in an emergency, and the police air wing are also exempt (*Air Navigation Regulations 2001*).

EAPL (2007:43) says the existing curfew will prevent it from meeting the demand of the corporate jet market. The *Draft Plan* does not specifically propose any changes to the existing curfew arrangement but the issue is of great concern to residents.

Under no circumstances should the curfew be weakened or watered down. Indeed the present arrangements should be strengthened.

The existing curfew arrangements are ineffective as exempt aircraft still cause disturbances for residents. My joint submission to the Essendon Airport *Draft Master Plan* contains comprehensive feedback from residents regarding this issue.

In terms of curfew hours, other Airports around Australia currently have 11pm-6am curfews.

As part of a process to phase aircraft out of the site and improve the lives of local residents, the curfew should be enforced for all aircraft between the hours of 11pm and 6am, with no exemptions. I have made the following recommendation in my joint submission;

**Recommendation 5:** The existing curfew to be enforced, with no exemptions, between the hours of 11pm and 6am.

Along with issues surrounding the curfew, this inquiry should also consider the issue of weight limitations of aircraft permitted to access Essendon Airport.

EAPL (2007:43) says Essendon is not permitted to land aircraft above 45,000 MTOW. Due to this status, they presently refuse up to three Boeing Business Jet movements per month, which exceed 79,000kg. The demand for this aircraft will significantly rise in the coming decade.

There is no specific proposal by EAPL to increase the weight of aircraft permitted to access the site, but any change in this direction would be vigorously resisted by local residents and by me.

Under no circumstances should the weight limitations be altered. Corporate jet aircraft should be relocated to more appropriate locations such as Tullamarine and Avalon, who are expanding to cater for larger aircraft.

Existing aircraft infrastructure at Essendon, including the North-South runway is inadequate and below CASA standards to cater for existing jet aircraft, let alone aircraft which are double the weight of existing aircraft.

An increase in weight limitations would mean aviation infrastructure would have to be upgraded and new facilities, beyond what is proposed in the *Draft Master Plan*, may need to be constructed. As discussed in Section 10.1 of the joint submission, no further proposals to increase aircraft oriented infrastructure should be implemented.

**Recommendation 6:** No changes to existing weight limitations on aircraft accessing Essendon Airport should occur.

### 3.5 Noise

The Issues Paper raises the growth of airport impacts on the communities surrounding the airports, particularly through increased noise and traffic. A key challenge at major airports is to integrate planning for the development of the airport site with consideration of the impacts outside the airport (Department of Infrastructure & Transport 2008:10).

The Essendon Airport *Draft Master Plan* does not forecast significant changes in noise levels over the next twenty years. Many residents believe that over recent times noise levels have significantly increased, with aircraft being relocated closer to residential properties following the commercial development of the land where they were once located.

As illustrated in my joint submission, many residents have expressed concern over noise generated from the Essendon Airport. Any intensification of aircraft activity would increase noise levels. Increases in noise may have adverse health consequences.

A European study that involved 140 volunteers, living either near London's Heathrow Airport or one of the three other major European Airports, found they had significantly higher levels of blood pressure.

Participants were fitted with a blood pressure monitor, and noise levels were measured in their bedrooms at night. In all participants blood pressure significantly increased after noise even greater than 35 decibels, such as a plane

flying overhead, was registered. This effect could be seen even if the person remained asleep, and the louder the noise, the greater the blood pressure. Given that high blood pressure can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and dementia, it is important that all possible measures are taken to reduce noise generated from aircraft accessing Essendon Airport, particularly in the evenings (White 2008).

A three country study on the effect aircraft and traffic noise have on young children, found that aircraft noise significantly affected reading comprehension and some aspects of memory. The reason aircraft noise was found to be harmful was due to its intensity and interrupting nature (Swan 2005).

Prolonged exposure to aircraft noise for young children can result in children not doing as well on difficult tasks, like reading, problem solving and memory, when compared to children in quiet areas. A reason for this is thought to be that prolonged noise exposure can raise the levels of cortisol. This can have significant effects on body functions (Western Australian Government (Accessed 2008:5).

Given the number of young children living in and attending local schools, such as Strathmore North Primary School, in the immediate vicinity of Essendon Airport, this is of concern.

Aircraft noise in the evening may change sleep state, and thus lower quality of sleep. It may also contribute to heart disease, further disturb individuals with existing mental illness and may reduce the effectiveness of the immune system (Western Australian Government (Accessed 2008:6).

Interim measures to minimise noise during the curfew period at Essendon Airport would be to implement Recommendations 5 and 7 made in the joint submission.

**Recommendation 5:** The existing curfew to be enforced, with no exemptions, between the hours of 11pm and 6am.

**Recommendation 7:** EAPL and Air Services Australia should investigate 'fly neighbourly' flight paths for helicopters at Essendon similar to the paths that are in place throughout Australia's National Parks.

### **3.6 Re-locating aircraft from Essendon Airport**

This inquiry should examine the options available for phasing out and relocating aircraft from Essendon Airport.

It is forecast that single piston aircraft movements are likely to continue to decline by 3% per annum over the next twenty years, and twin piston aircraft movements are likely to continue to decline by 1.5% per annum. During the same timeframe, EAPL (2007:44) forecast single turboprop movements are likely to increase by 3% and corporate jet movements to rise by 3%.

In light of these figures, the revised *Master Plan* should propose to phase out single and twin piston aircraft, given their demand is decreasing at Essendon due to competition from other airfields.

These airfields which have been expanding and directly competing with Essendon include Bacchus Marsh, Wallan, Lilydale, Coldstream, Sunbury,

Tyabb, Moorabbin, Torquay, Mangalore, Barwon Heads and Ballarat. With the exception of Moorabbin, all are significantly smaller, have lower cost structures, fewer regulations and can instigate landing charges lower than Essendon (EAPL 2007:43-44).

Capacity movements at Moorabbin Airport are 450,000 movements per annum (Ambidji Group 2000:7). Traffic levels at Moorabbin reached a then peak of 402,000 aircraft movements in 1989. Movements since have stabilised at around 340,000. (Moorabbin Airport 2004:22).

A key element of Moorabbin Airport's last *Draft Master Plan* (2004:14) included the maintenance of a full functioning and suitably licensed airport of major significance both to the Melbourne metropolitan area and to the State of Victoria. The primary function will continue to be that of General Aviation of all forms, with special emphasis on the vital training role the airport performs.

It is expected that Point Cook Airport would reach its current capacity around 2020. This capacity can be increased substantially by the construction of a small parallel runway (Ambidji Group 2000:9).

The closure of Essendon Airport may also result in airfields to the West of Melbourne, featuring as primary choices for many of the General Aviation operators from Essendon. This would include Bacchus Marsh, for its level of infrastructure and the lack of other alternatives to the west (Ambidji 2000:10).

The Victorian Department of Infrastructure found that capacity exists at Melbourne and Avalon Airports for the larger corporate jets and regional airline services currently utilising Essendon (Ambidji Group 2000:7). The airports mentioned that could absorb Essendon's General Aviation sector, in particular Point Cook, do not have the runway length to take high end corporate jets and regional airlines (Ambidji Group 2000:9).

Avalon Airport, which was leased in 1997 through LinFox, has substantially increased its jet aviation activity through the construction of new terminals, infrastructure and through its agreement with JetStar. Recent figures show JetStar's operations at Avalon have brought in over one million passengers through its once empty terminal (Pheasant 2006).

JetStar has built its volume and operations as a consequence of landing fees and terminal charges that are lower than those at Tullamarine (Pheasant 2006).

It is anticipated that Avalon could share 10% of Melbourne's domestic passenger market and also win international business. Avalon's plans include increasing the number of staff on site from 1000 to between 4000 and 5000 through aviation and non-aviation developments (Pheasant 2006).

In light of these major expansion plans for jet aircraft at Avalon, EAPL should investigate relocating its jet aircraft there from Essendon.

In recent times concern has been raised about the absence of a manned control tower at Avalon. A physical tower exists at Avalon, but it is not manned (Cowan 2007).

Avalon is currently served by a mixture of light and jet aircraft, including Virgin Blue and JeStar planes. Traffic at the Airport is expected to top 1.4 million

passengers this year, with CASA recently determining that air traffic services should be provided (Creedy 2008).

CASA's study found that controlled "C Class" airspace and associated air traffic services should be provided when passenger planes are operating. A "Class C" service, including an air traffic control tower at Avalon, would significantly reduce risk to passenger planes from light aircraft (Creedy 2008).

In relocating corporate jet aircraft from Essendon Airport, control tower resources from Essendon could also be transferred to Avalon. This will both improve safety at Avalon and provide ongoing employment for staff now based at Essendon.

Tullamarine Airport is also expanding to cater for more aircraft movements and passengers. In 2007 a \$330 million expansion was announced, which included the construction of new luggage facilities, terminal facilities, a double decker aerobridge to cater for A380 aircraft and increased space for outbound passenger processing (Melbourne Airport 2007).

The current Melbourne Airport *Draft Master Plan* (2008:54) states work done in the past to examine the possible closure of Essendon Airport indicates that the impact on Melbourne Airport would not pose master planning issues on the condition that future facility development is limited to providing adequate space for speed compatible (heavy jet) aircraft from Essendon.

Melbourne Airport is a service to air transport demand, passenger and freight, and not general aviation (Melbourne Airport 2008:54).

Given the expansion of Tullamarine to cater for more aircraft and passengers, and its ability to cater for jet aircraft, EAPL and this inquiry should also investigate relocating its jet aviation activities to this location.

In relation to emergency service helicopters that are currently based at Essendon Airport, I have recommended in my joint submission that a long term permanent base for them also be sought.

In formulating our joint submission, Ms Maddigan MP and I received a great deal of correspondence from residents regarding the movement of helicopters and emergency service aircraft.

The Victorian Government's Melbourne 2030 plan states that in the medium term, Essendon Airport should be closed and transformed into a significant employment and residential precinct. The Victorian Government (2008:4.3) recently announced the construction of a new Essendon Airport based Emergency Services Air Wing Centre (EAPL 2007:81).

The Civil Aviation Orders (1988) state helicopters are exempt from provisions in the Civil Aviation Regulations 1988 pertaining to flight paths and landings.

The Civil Aviation Regulations (1988) state that the pilot in command of an aircraft must not fly the aircraft over any city, town or populous area at a height lower than 1,000 feet or any other area at a height lower than 500 feet.

The Regulations exempt the pilot of an aircraft engaged in a search, rescue, the dropping of supplies, or an aircraft operated by the Federal Police or police of a State or Territory engaged in law enforcement operations.

Currently at Essendon Airport, emergency service helicopters are permitted to operate around the clock with no fixed flight paths or restrictions (*Air Navigation Regulations 2001*).

Helicopter flights in World Heritage Areas in Australia, specifically Great Barrier Marine Park, Tasmanian Wilderness, Kakadu National Park, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and the Blue Mountains, have what is referred to as a 'Fly Neighbourly' Agreement with aircraft relating to sensitive areas of the Parks. These agreements are voluntary codes of practice which ask aircraft to fly above certain elevations except in specific routes and keep a minimum horizontal distance from important areas (Commonwealth Parliamentary Library 2008).

The 'Fly Neighbourly' Agreement is intended to protect both wilderness values and amenity for visitors and residents. A similar Agreement also exists at the Moorabbin Training Area, Grampians National Park, and Port Campbell areas.

Many residents have expressed concern about the emergency services at the Airport.

A written response from the previous Minister for Transport and Regional Services, The Hon Mark Vaile, of 24<sup>th</sup> August 2007, to my representations of 6<sup>th</sup> July 2007, stated there are no lanes or corridors that helicopters are required to use as they depart or approach Essendon Airport.

The procedures used to manage the noise from aircraft operations are tailored for each airport. In order to minimise disturbances for residents, alternate and more resident friendly helicopter flight paths must be sought. This could involve helicopters being made to follow existing fixed wing flight paths for the North-South and East-West runways and also make the most of local terrain.

In relation to the curfew and its application to emergency service helicopters, the existing curfew permits emergency service helicopters to operate around the clock. Alternative locations to house emergency service helicopters during the curfew period should be investigated.

The argument that Essendon is closer to hospitals than Tullamarine and therefore saves travel times in an emergency is immaterial. Helicopters can and should land at helipads located at Melbourne's major hospitals, including the Alfred, Royal Melbourne and Children's Hospitals.

This inquiry should consider an alternative location for emergency service helicopters to be located. I have made the following recommendations in the joint submission to EAPL;

**Recommendation 7:** EAPL and Air Services Australia should investigate 'fly neighbourly' flight paths for helicopters at Essendon similar to the paths that are in place throughout Australia's National Parks.

**Recommendation 8:** An alternative long term permanent base for Emergency Service Helicopters and aircraft should be sought.

#### **4. Financial benefits of phasing aircraft out from Essendon**

A study commissioned by the Victorian Department of Infrastructure found there are net benefits to the economy as a whole resulting from closing Essendon Airport (Ambidji Group 2000:5).

In 2001 the Howard Government leased Essendon Airport to Linfox and Becton Groups for \$22 million. At the same time the 305 hectare site, 11 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD was valued between \$70 million and \$100 million (Davidson 2008).

Essendon Airport is not profitable as an Airport. It was leased in 2001 with restrictions on the type of aircraft accessing the site and hours of operations. It was not profitable then as an airport and as the current *Draft Master Plan* outlines, it is still not profitable without relaxation of the curfew and plane size (Davidson 2008).

Essendon Airport through the current *Draft Master Plan* process has an opportunity to put forward proposals to commence phasing aircraft out of the Airport. Negotiations should be initiated with the Federal Government on future alternatives and land use options for the site, which would be to the financial benefit of both the private operators and taxpayers.

## 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by Kelvin Thomson MP and Judy Maddigan MP in their joint submission to the Essendon Airport *Preliminary Draft Master Plan* process, which EAPL are encouraged to implement and this review take into consideration in their account in this matter.

**Recommendation 1:** Proposals to construct any new aviation facilities should not be undertaken. *The Draft Master Plan* should put forward plans to phase out existing aviation infrastructure.

**Recommendation 2:** While aircraft remain at the Airport no proposals to significantly invest further in aviation support systems be undertaken unless aviation and residential safety would be otherwise compromised.

**Recommendation 3:** Single and Twin Piston aircraft to be phased out and relocated to other airports.

**Recommendation 4:** Jet aircraft should be phased out from Essendon and relocated to Tullamarine and Avalon. In the interim, jet aircraft movements should be capped at existing rates.

**Recommendation 5:** The existing curfew to be enforced, with no exemptions, between the hours of 11pm and 6am.

**Recommendation 6:** No changes to existing weight limitations on aircraft accessing Essendon Airport should occur.

**Recommendation 7:** EAPL and Air Services Australia should investigate 'fly neighbourly' flight paths for helicopters at Essendon similar to the paths that are in place throughout Australia's National Parks.

**Recommendation 8:** An alternative long term permanent base for Emergency Service Helicopters and aircraft should be sought.

**Recommendation 9:** The Minister commission an environmental and health impact study from the Department of Transport and the EPA, on aircraft fumes and their impact on resident health and the local environment if aircraft remain at the Airport.

**Recommendation 10:** Minimum buffer zones between residential back fences and future commercial developments to be proposed.

**Recommendation 11:** Public comment process to be extended by at least 1 more month.

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