



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Senate
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
References Committee report:**

Impact and mitigation of aircraft noise

April 2025

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Overview

The Australian Government has considered the report by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the Committee) into the impact and mitigation of aircraft noise.

Aircraft noise is an inevitable by-product of aviation activity. However, the level of aircraft noise experienced by communities is affected by a range of factors including: planning and development, volume and type of aircraft, noise abatement procedures and land use planning and building standards in areas surrounding airports.

The impact of aircraft noise on residents and communities in the vicinity of airports is a matter the Government takes seriously, and a number of initiatives have been implemented since 2022.

The Government notes in particular the increase in concerns relating to aircraft noise following the opening of the new runway at Brisbane Airport in 2020, where it is clear that the consultation undertaken at the time was not sufficient in informing the community of impending flight path changes or in incorporating community feedback in flight path design. In approving the Melbourne Third Runway proposal in September 2024, the Government included a range of conditions designed to ensure that no one community would bear the impact of aircraft noise from the new runway.

The Government is committed to managing and minimising the impacts of aircraft noise. The *Aviation White Paper: Towards 2050* outlines the Australian Government's approach to airport planning and noise and its commitment to improve engagement with communities affected by flight path decisions.

Many of the issues sought to be addressed through the recommendations of the report are already being managed within the existing regulatory framework and were considered in determining priorities for reform through the Aviation White Paper process.

The Australian Government will continue to work proactively with the aviation industry and other levels of government, to mitigate the impact of aircraft noise now and into the future.

Australian Government response

The Australian Government's response to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee report: *Impact and mitigation of aircraft noise* is set out in detail below.

Recommendation 1:

2.80 The committee recommends that the conditions for approval of the Western Sydney Airport include a requirement for the Western Sydney Airport Corporation to study the impact of its flights on Australian native species.

The Government **supports** this recommendation.

As a condition of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government's approval of the preliminary flight paths for Western Sydney International (Nancy Bird Walton) Airport, WSA Co Limited will undertake a comprehensive Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) to monitor impacts of the flight paths on environmental values including Australian native species.

Recommendation 2:

2.116 The committee recommends that the Australian Government researches the impacts of aircraft noise exposure on human health, including sleep, and associated economic impacts.

The Government **agrees** in principle to this recommendation.

The Government notes that industry has a social responsibility to understand and reduce the negative impacts of its operations on local communities.

As a condition of approval for the major development plan for the construction of a third runway at Melbourne Airport, a community health study into the impacts of aircraft noise will be undertaken, funded by the airport operator.

This health study will be the first large-scale and long-term investigation of aviation and community health of its kind. The Government notes the study may provide findings and/or a model that may be applicable for future major airport developments.

Recommendation 3:

3.63 The committee recommends that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority urgently investigates the implementation of higher tailwind take-off thresholds for aircraft that are capable of doing so safely.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government's *Aviation White Paper: Towards 2050* outlines the Australian Government's approach and states that it will "hold the [aviation] sector accountable for minimising noise impacts where it is safe to do so".

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) supports a voluntary shared risk approach to increasing the tailwind component based on a locally agreed runway use program which brings pilots and aircraft operators into the decision-making process.

The Government notes that any changes to take-off thresholds and other arrangements to increase operational parameter envelopes such as tailwind limits and crosswind thresholds need to be consistent with and support current domestic regulation. This regulation includes noise-sharing agreements such as the Sydney Airport Long Term Operating Plan which aims to balance aircraft noise across communities in close proximity to the airport.

Recommendation 4:

3.64 The committee recommends that Airservices Australia supports maximum possible use, within weather and operational constraints, of simultaneous opposite direction parallel runway operations (SODPROPs) at Brisbane Airport.

The Government **supports** this recommendation.

Airservices Australia (Airservices) has implemented the *Ministerial Direction – Airservices (Use of Simultaneous Opposite Direction Parallel Runway Operations at Brisbane Airport) Direction 2024*, dated 16 September 2024. The Direction required Airservices to prioritise the development of, and deliver, procedures which will require the use of the Simultaneous Opposite Direction Parallel Runway Operations (SODPROPS) during both day time and night time operations at Brisbane Airport, when meteorological conditions and other operational conditions, including traffic levels, allow.

Airservices continues to engage with CASA and Brisbane Airport Corporation to explore ways to enable increased operations over water, including the use of SODPROPS, that would reduce noise over communities.

Recommendation 5:

3.66 The committee recommends that Airservices Australia prioritises work to standardise the use of continuous descent operations and continuous climb operations as the preferential mode for landing and take-off at major airports, including Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, where it is safe to do so.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

The continuous descent operations known as ‘predictable sequencing’, which reduce air traffic control intervention for high altitudes, are currently being trialled in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, and Brisbane.

Recommendation 6:

3.106 The committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts changes the rules for Brisbane airport such that aircraft operating at night must meet the requirements of the ICAO Chapter 14—Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management rules. After an appropriate time of this rule's use, the Government should review whether the same standard could apply to other airports.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

ICAO Annex 16 Volume 1 specifies the noise standards which apply to the certification of aircraft types, rather than being a standard that can be applied as an operating restriction. The standards under Chapter 14 of the Annex were enacted in Australia by the *Air Navigation (Aircraft Noise) Regulations 2018*. Chapter 14 applies to aircraft types certified after 2018 and also allows aircraft types certified under the earlier Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 standards to continue operating alongside Chapter 14 certified aircraft.

The Australian Governments will continue to apply the ICAO Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management:

- reduction of noise at source (aircraft manufacturers designing quieter aircraft);
- land use planning (restrictions on land use around airports to reduce noise impacts);
- noise Abatement Operational Procedures (noise preferred runways, continuous descent approaches, flight path design); and
- operating restrictions (such as movement caps and curfews), noting that the Australian Government has committed in the Aviation White Paper not to introduce curfew or movement caps at additional airports in Australia.

Recommendation 7:

3.107 The committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts develops guidelines for 'noise envelopes' at Australian airports, against which airports should provide transparent reporting. The Government should review the record of airports in meeting certain noise thresholds once an appropriate amount of comparable data has been collected.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

Under the current regulatory system, airports are required to develop an Australian Noise Exposure Forecast as part of an airport Master Plan.

The Australian Government, through the *Aviation White Paper: Towards 2050*, is developing new policies that will aim to reduce the impacts of noise over the community. Building on the success of the 'Fly Neighbourly' agreements in place across many airports around Australia, the Australian Government will develop national guidance on 'Flying Considerately' for aircraft operating under visual flight rules or outside of controlled airspace.

This guidance will be incorporated into the Aeronautical Information Package which is distributed to pilots by Airservices Australia.

Recommendation 8:

3.140 The committee recommends that the Australian Government amends the Airports Act 1996, and associated Regulations, to require airport Master Plans and Major Development Plans (where applicable) to address the issue of compensation for residents affected by the additional noise generated by the airport.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government intends to review the *Airports Act 1996* (the Act) and supporting regulations by 2030 to consider regulatory arrangements for a wide range of matters, including ownership requirements, planning, development and environmental management of the airport sites.

As part of the existing approval process for airport Master Plans and Major Development Plans, the Minister considers Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) and Australian Noise Exposure Concept (ANEC) impacts and noise mitigation requirements, and whether a Noise Amelioration program is already in place at the airport. The Minister may also choose to impose conditions on an Airport Lessee Company (ALC), including to undertake a noise amelioration program as part of the development.

Recommendation 9:

3.141 As part of the approval process for airport Master Plans, and Major Development Plans which significantly alter or add new runways, the committee recommends that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government considers whether an airport should be declared a leviable airport under the Aircraft Noise Levy Act 1995.

3.142 Any decision to designate an airport as leviable should be based on a threshold set by the Australian Government in consultation with industry and other stakeholders to ensure that the Commonwealth's interests are protected under the arrangements.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The primary aim of the *Aircraft Noise Levy Act 1995* is to put in place arrangements for the imposition and collection of an aircraft noise levy at certain airports. This seeks to recover from aircraft operators the costs incurred in the Commonwealth providing noise amelioration programmes in the vicinity of airports.

Leviable airports are defined by the *Aircraft Noise Levy Collection Act 1995*, which states that an airport must have a public building or a residence within a certain ANEF contour and have, or have previously had, a Commonwealth noise amelioration scheme in place, before the Minister can declare it a leviable airport.

Under this legislation, the levy applies to landings of jet aircraft at declared airports. The Minister may, by notice in the Gazette, declare an airport to be a 'leviable airport' for a set period.

Recommendation 10:

4.64 The committee recommends that the Australian Government moves Australia's flight path design principles towards an altitude-based priorities approach—with a view to prioritising minimising noise for communities, and for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks (below a certain altitude). The Government should conduct an expert review to establish what altitudes should be set for Australian conditions.

The Government **supports** this recommendation.

Altitude-based priority approaches give different weightings to flight-path design inputs based on height.

Airservices is currently developing weighted decision-making criteria which will enable assessment of matters such as altitude-based design priorities to be completed using its established Flight Path Design Principles.

Recommendation 11:

4.68 The committee recommends the Federal Minister for Transport issues a direction stating that Airservices must respond to Flight Path Change Requests within a reasonable and clearly articulated timeframe, and publicly explain any delays.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

When a request is lodged regarding changes to a flight path operating in existing airspace, this requires a significant assessment of all flight paths within the prescribed airspace.

The next Statement of Expectations for Airservices will set out the Minister's expectations regarding clear and regular engagement with the Department, CASA, industry and the community on the development and implementation of significant changes to air navigation, and a coordinated approach to airport planning and management of aircraft noise to minimise the impact of aircraft operations on communities where practicable.

Recommendation 12:

4.70 The committee recommends that changes to flight paths and airspace management that result in significant community impacts should be subject to referral for review by the new, independent Aircraft Noise Ombudsman.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Government is in the process of establishing an independent Aircraft Noise Ombudsman (ANO) that will have the authority to conduct investigative reviews into how Airservices Australia and Defence have handled aircraft noise complaints, the community consultation processes regarding changes affecting aircraft noise, and how aircraft noise information is presented and distributed. The ANO may publish independent reports and make recommendations to the Government for policy or regulatory change.

Recommendation 13:

4.72 The committee recommends that, in cases where an airport in a metropolitan area adds a new or expanded runway, Airservices considers conducting a full-scale review of the broader airspace in the greater metropolitan area.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

Airservices, along with the Royal Australian Air Force, manages and operates Australian airspace, in a manner consistent with CASA's administrative direction.

CASA is an independent statutory authority that regulates and administers Australia's airspace and ensures the safety of aviation in Australia, by licensing pilots, certifying aerodromes, and overseeing aviation safety, including ensuring that Australian airspace is used safely.

The *Australian Airspace Policy Statement* provides guidance to CASA. Paragraph 13 of the draft *Australian Airspace Policy Statement 2025* states that CASA will "continue to undertake regular reviews of Australia's airspace architecture, services, facilities and airspace user obligations" and "consider proven international best practice airspace systems with a view to deliver safe, efficient and appropriate airspace arrangements".

CASA receives and reviews Airspace Change proposals for any changed or additional airspace usage, for example in response to a new runway. CASA's Office of Airspace Regulation can review airspace to ensure aircraft operations are safe and airspace architecture is fit for purpose in response to an airspace change proposal.

Recommendation 14:

5.112 The committee recommends that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government directs departmental representatives to participate fully in Community Aviation Consultation Group meetings, preferably attending in person.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

Community Aviation Consultation Groups (CACGs) are community-focused groups to inform Leased Federal Airports (LFAs) of community views. CACGs are intended to improve the exchange of information, complement consultation requirements for Master Plans and MDPs, and allow discussion between the airport and communities affected by its operations and plans.

Department officials will attend CACG meetings where there are relevant agenda items for discussion and it is appropriate to attend.

Recommendation 15:

5.114 The committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts facilitates the provision, through the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman or Airservices Australia, of appropriate technical support for noise related issues to community representatives, including access to technical experts, where necessary.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

Airservices and the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman both regularly attend CACGs, the Brisbane Airspace Advisory Board (AAB), the Sydney Airport Community Forum (SACF) and the Forum on Western Sydney Airport (FOWSA), and provide community representatives with access to a range of technical information and specialists, in addition to information publicly available on the Airservices website.

Airservices liaises with many community representatives who contact Airservices personnel directly to seek technical advice about specific operations. Airservices will consider further how they could facilitate extra representation on these matters.

Recommendation 16:

5.122 The committee recommends that Airservices Australia builds upon work already undertaken to improve its community engagement framework by urgently developing robust processes for considering, responding to, and—where applicable—implementing outcomes of consultation processes.

The Government **supports** this recommendation.

The Australian Government has set expectations for Airservices to apply best-practice consultation when designing airspace and flight path changes.

Airservices published a Community Engagement Standard (CES) for flight path and airspace change proposals in September 2023. The CES provides a clearly defined process for engaging with the public on flight path and airspace changes of various scopes, scales and complexities, which was benchmarked and based on international best practice.

Airservices will continue to evolve the CES, which has established a benchmark against which to measure Airservices' performance, and contains robust processes for considering, responding to and implementing the outcomes of community consultation processes.

Recommendation 17:

5.129 The committee recommends that the Australian Government investigates international approaches to the provision of public information about aircraft and noise and flight movements, and alternative models for noise complaint handling services. The Noise Complaints and Information Service function should be removed from Airservices Australia. A replacement service should aim to provide a more effective service for community members and allow Airservices to concentrate on its core functions. The Government should consult with affected communities about what alternative body should handle complaints and what oversight should be provided to the complaints handling service.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Australian Government is establishing an Aircraft Noise Ombudsman that will be independent of Airservices.

Recommendation 18:

6.74 The committee recommends that, as part of its review of the *Airports Act 1996* and associated regulations, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts seeks to modernise the process and requirements for Airport Master Plans and Major Development Plans (MDPs), including by:

- increasing the threshold for MDPs to an amount that appropriately reflects increases in construction costs since the existing threshold was set;
- requiring all future Master Plans (and MDPs, where relevant) to include easily-understood noise mapping, such as N65 and N60 contours, while maintaining the requirement for an Australian Noise Exposure Forecast;
- requiring Master Plans and MDPs to demonstrate consistency with the National Airports Safeguarding Framework;
- including clearer guidelines for assessing noise impacts as part of the environmental assessment process;
- including a requirement for airports to outline noise mitigation strategies in their Master Plans and MDPs; and
- introducing a requirement that, for major projects with the highest noise and environmental impacts (such as new runways), airports must conduct a comprehensive review of the accuracy of predicted noise outcomes within five years of operation and report their findings publicly and to government.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

Under Initiative 40 of the White Paper, the Australian Government intends to review the *Airports Act 1996* and supporting regulations by 2030 to consider regulatory arrangements for a wide range of matters, including ownership requirements, planning, development and environmental management of airport sites.

Recommendation 19:

6.143 The committee recommends that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government of Australia issues a revised Statement of Expectations for Airservices Australia within six months which outlines the Government's expectation that Airservices will:

- abide by statutory noise sharing arrangements, including those outlined in the Long-Term Operating Plan (LTOP) for Sydney Airport;
- adequately staff and support air traffic control, including to ensure noise mitigation procedures can be operationalised;
- adequately staff and support the organisation's engagement and operational areas to ensure the timely consideration of its Post Implementation Reviews, other consultations, and the timely implementation of noise mitigation strategies; and
- prioritise the urgent recruitment, retention and training of air traffic controllers to return its air traffic control service to pre-pandemic levels within 12 months.

The Government **notes** this recommendation.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in setting out expectations regarding Airservices' strategic direction and the manner in which it should perform its functions, may consider outcomes of inquiries or reviews relating to Airservices.

The current Statement of Expectations sets out, among other matters, expectations that Airservices:

- continues the commitment to the Sydney Airport LTOP;
- minimises the impact of aircraft operations on communities where practicable;
- ensures it has in place sufficient, competent staff resources available to provide Air Traffic Services;
- applies sufficient resources to the Airservices Noise Complaints and Information Service and the independent Aircraft Noise Ombudsman; and
- gives due consideration to the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman's findings and recommendations.

The Government is in the process of revising the Statement of Expectations for Airservices.

Recommendation 20:

6.148 The committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts works with Airservices Australia, the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman and aviation industry stakeholders to create a modern, user-friendly website that provides a 'single source of truth' for the community. This process should include comprehensive community consultation.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

The department and Airservices will continue to collaborate on continuous improvement to provide high-quality information to the public including through the existing websites as well as enhancements to community feedback mechanisms.

Recommendation 21:

6.156 The committee recommends that the National Airports Safeguarding Advisory Group considers adopting a mechanism to require planning authorities to proactively notify airport corporations of significant proposed new developments close to airports.

The Government **agrees in principle** to this recommendation.

The National Airports Safeguarding Advisory Group (NASAG) has, as part of its responsibilities, consideration of the nine current guidelines forming the National Airports Safeguarding Framework (NASF). As well as Airservices and CASA, NASAG also includes state and territory government planning and transport officials and the Australian Local Government Association. The framework includes:

- Guideline A, which considers the Management of Aircraft Noise, to inform strategic planning and to provide communities with comprehensive and understandable information about aircraft noise
- Guideline F, which considers the Management of Protected Airspace Intrusion and the provision of advice for planners and decision makers about working within and around protected airspace, including Obstacle Limitation Surface and Procedures for Air Navigational Services—Aircraft Operations intrusions, and how these can be better integrated into local planning processes.

The *Aviation White Paper: Towards 2050* sets out the Australian Government’s objectives of improving land use planning outcomes near airports to seek to avoid further development that is inappropriate for the noise level and to protect airport operations from potential safety risks. This involves working with NASAG to update NASF Guideline A by 2027 to describe best-practice approaches for including aircraft noise exposure notifications on property titles for new developments, and to improve education on the NASF for local planning officials.

Responsibility for aligning state and territory planning processes with the NASF rests with each state and territory, with handling of this responsibility able to be discussed by NASAG.