



Master Plans

Process summary under the *Airports Act 1996*

October 2026

Overview

The *Airports Act 1996* (the Act) sets out approval processes for Master Plans which governs land use and planning on leased federal airports. A Master Plan sets the future strategic direction for land use, development, and operations at the airport. It also includes the Airport Environment Strategy, which sets out the future strategic direction for environmental management at the airport.

Under subsection 70(1) of the Act, a final Master Plan is required for each leased federal airport (excluding Tennant Creek and Mount Isa, which are not subject to Part 5 of the Act). The Master Plan covers a planning period of 20 years (as outlined in section 72 of the Act), with an initial planning period of 5 or 8 years, depending on the airport (as outlined in subsection 71(3A)).

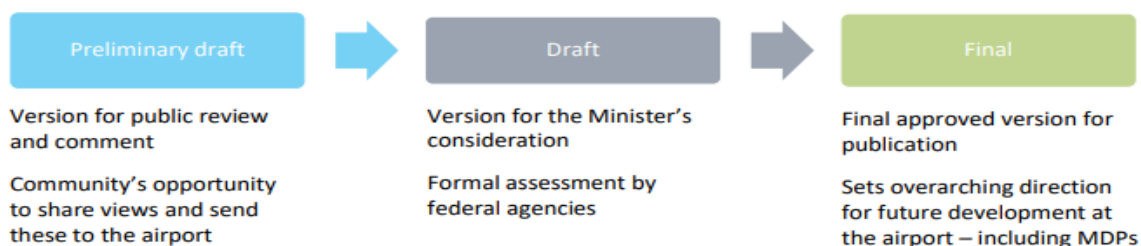
The Minister with responsibility for the Act must make a decision to approve, or refuse to approve, each draft Master Plan before they come into force.

Purpose of a Master Plan

Subsection 70(2) of the Act sets out that the purposes of a Master Plan are to:

- establish the strategic direction for efficient and economic development of the airport;
- provide for the development of additional uses of the airport site;
- indicate to the public the intended uses of the airport site;
- reduce potential conflicts between uses of the airport site, and ensure that uses are compatible with areas surrounding the airport;
- ensure that all operations at the airport are undertaken in accordance with relevant environmental legislation and standards;
- establish a framework for assessing compliance at the airport with relevant environmental legislation and standards; and
- promote the continual improvement of environmental management at the airport.

Master Plan consideration process



Preliminary draft (including public consultation)

An airport-lessee company is required to publicly exhibit a preliminary draft Master Plan for 60 business days, and invite members of the public to provide written comments about the preliminary draft during this period, prior to submitting a draft Master Plan to the Minister.

Under section 79 of the Act, before giving the Minister a draft Master Plan under section 75, 76 or 78, the airport-lessee company for the airport must advise, in writing, the following persons of its intention to give the Minister the draft Master Plan:

- the Minister of the State in which the airport is situated with responsibility for town planning or use of land;
- the authority of that State with responsibility for town planning or use of land;
- each local government body with responsibility for an area surrounding the airport.

An airport-lessee company is required to provide the Minister with copies of the comments it receives from members of the public and other stakeholders on the preliminary draft version of the Master Plan. The airport-lessee company is also required to demonstrate due regard for those comments in preparing the draft Master Plan that is submitted to the Minister.

Draft (submitted to the Minister)

The Act requires a draft Master Plan to be submitted to the Minister prior to the expiry of the final Master Plan in force. Once a draft Master Plan is submitted, section 81 of the Act requires that the Minister must either approve or refuse to approve the plan.

Matters to which the Minister must have regard

In deciding whether to approve the plan, the Minister must have regard to the following matters:

- the extent to which the plan achieves the purposes of a final master plan;
- the extent to which carrying out the plan would meet present and future requirements of civil aviation users of the airport, and other users of the airport, for services and facilities relating to the airport concerned;
- the effect that carrying out the plan would be likely to have on the use of land within the airport site concerned, and in areas surrounding the airport;
- the consultations undertaken in preparing the plan (including the outcome of the consultations); and
- the views of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Airservices Australia, in so far as they relate to safety aspects and operational aspects of the plan.

The Minister has 50 business days (or up to 60 business days if a written notice is provided to the airport-lessee company), after a draft Master Plan is submitted to make the decision. If the Minister does not make a decision by the end of this period, the Minister is taken to have approved the draft Master Plan.

If the Minister believes they do not have enough material to make a proper decision to approve or refuse to approve a draft Master Plan, the Minister may request the airport-lessee company provide specified material relevant to making the decision. A request of this nature stops the Minister's 50 business day assessment period until all requested material is received from the airport-lessee company. The clock resumes the day after this information has been received.

Final (approved by the Minister)

Should the Minister approve a draft Master Plan, the airport-lessee company must publish the final Master Plan within 50 business days after approval.

The final Master Plan sets the direction for all future development on the airport site. In particular, major development plans must be consistent with a final Master Plan for an airport.

There are provisions under the Act for the airport-lessee company to submit draft minor variations to the Master Plan if required while the plan is in force.

Refusal

Should the Minister refuse to approve a draft Master Plan, the Minister must advise the airport-lessee company in writing of their decision, and provide a statement of reasons.

Should the Minister refuse to approve a draft Master Plan, the Minister may, by written notice direct the airport-lessee company to submit a fresh draft Master Plan to the Minister, either within 180 days, or within a longer period allowed by the Minister.

The current Master Plan remains in force until a replacement is approved by the Minister.

Review of decisions

The Minister's decision to approve, or refuse to approve, a draft Master Plan may be subject to appeal to the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART). An application to the ART for review of a decision may be made by the person or persons whose interests are affected by the decision. The ART will then make an assessment on whether an applicant has standing.

Planning Cycle for Master Plans

Section 77 of the Act specifies that a final Master Plan lasts for a period of five or eight years.

Section 76 requires that an ALC must submit a draft Master Plan to the Minister no later than five years, or eight years (depending on the airport, as outlined in the table below), after the current final Master Plan came into force (i.e. was approved by the Minister under subsection 81(2) of the Act).

Planning cycle	Airports
5 years	Sydney, Western Sydney International (WSI), Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth
8 years	Adelaide, Alice Springs, Archerfield, Bankstown, Camden, Canberra, Darwin, Essendon, Gold Coast, Hobart, Jandakot, Launceston, Moorabbin, Parafield, Townsville