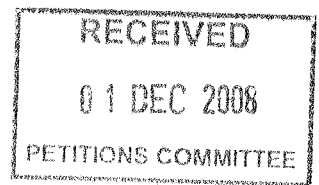




The Hon Anthony Albanese MP

Minister for Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development
and Local Government
Leader of the House



01 DEC 2008

Reference: 09029-2008

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 4 September 2008 referring two petitions from residents of the Canberra and Queanbeyan region about the Canberra Airport 2008 draft master plan.

The Australian Government regulates the Federal leased airports through the *Airports Act 1996* (the Act). Under the Act, airport operators must prepare an airport master plan which sets out the strategic planning framework at that airport over a 20 year period. The master plan is a key document that gives the aviation industry and other businesses certainty to plan and invest for the long term and gives clarity to travellers, airport users and the community affected by aviation activity. Master plans require updating every five years or earlier should I require it. The Act requires airport operators to provide a 60 business day public comment period for master plans. When submitting a master plan for my consideration, airport operators must clearly demonstrate how they have given due regard to comments made during the public comment period.

In late 2007, Canberra Airport released a preliminary draft master plan for a 60 business day public comment period. A significant number of the 122 public submissions received raised concerns about the potential noise and traffic impacts arising from the Airport's proposed freight hub. I do not consider Canberra Airport adequately addressed the substance of these concerns in the 2008 draft master plan.

Canberra Airport submitted the 2008 draft master plan for my consideration on 16 September 2008. On 21 November 2008, in accordance with the Act, I refused to approve the draft master plan on the basis it does not provide the necessary detail to meet the statutory purposes of a master plan and enable well informed public consideration of the proposed 20 year plan for the Airport.

I considered the draft master plan lacked an adequate level of detail about land use planning and the impact of the Airport's expansion plans on airport users and the community. This was largely due to a lack of detailed maps or diagrams to complement the Airport's stated development objectives and to reasonably articulate its intentions for the use of the airport site to the public. This lack of detail did not allow the public or myself to reasonably determine the intended uses of the airport site or the extent of any potential conflicts relating to land use on the airport or surrounding areas.

For your information, I have enclosed a copy of my 21 November 2008 Media Release, which broadly outlines my reasons for refusing to approve the Airport's 2008 draft master plan.

I have written to Canberra Airport informing them of the reasons for my decision and given them until 20 May 2009, or the statutory 180 days, to prepare and submit a new draft master plan for my consideration. The existing 2005 master plan remains in force until I approve a new plan.

In revising the draft master plan, Canberra Airport will need to undertake a further 60 day public comment period and bilateral consultations with relevant departments and agencies. It is critical that Canberra Airport carefully take into account the public's concerns and genuinely respond to these concerns in the revised master plan.

I acknowledge that many of our major cities are growing rapidly, which means more people are being affected by noise, congestion or other effects from airport operations. I support continued investment in aeronautical infrastructure at airports, however this needs to be balanced, planned and responsible.

In relation to a curfew at Canberra Airport, the Government considers it important to maintain a network of non-curfew airports nationally to ensure access for airlines and overnight air freight services to major airports. At Canberra, and other non-curfew airports, it is important to examine a range of alternate options for managing the impacts of aircraft noise particularly at night.

I believe one key element in improving noise management measures is better education and information-sharing through high quality and accessible aircraft noise information to enable increased involvement of communities in decisions relating to airport operations. I note that the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government has recently announced its intention to study aircraft noise levels at Hackett in the ACT with the results to be independently reviewed. The effective management of aircraft noise also requires appropriate land-use planning by State and Territory Governments to ensure that development near airports and under flight paths is compatible with airport uses.

I can assure you I will be giving detailed consideration to community concerns in reaching my decision on the revised draft master plan for Canberra Airport in 2009.

I trust this information will be of assistance in addressing the Committee's concerns.

Yours sincerely

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