

From: Aviation Historical Society of Australia Inc.

The Aviation Historical Society of Australia Inc (AHSA) is a not-for-profit organisation recognised as Australia's longest-established aviation history society and a national peak body dedicated to researching, recording and promoting Australia's civil and military aviation history. Founded in Melbourne in 1959, AHSA Inc supports the preservation and dissemination of aviation heritage through authoritative research, long-standing national publications, and an active membership base across Australia and internationally.

AHSA publishes the quarterly journal Aviation Heritage (formerly the AHSA Journal), featuring original research and historical scholarship, as well as the quarterly newsletter Outlook. The Society also convenes meetings and supports archival research and heritage engagement.

Members of AHSA's Victorian branch established the Australian Aircraft Restoration Group in 1962, which subsequently formed the Moorabbin Air Museum in 1965. AHSA's Queensland branch established the Queensland Air Museum in 1974 as a dedicated preservation and collecting arm, demonstrating AHSA's longstanding practical contribution to aviation heritage preservation and public access.

Point Cook RAAF Base is one of 60 ADF sites identified for Full Divestment.

Point Cook is Australia's most important Aviation heritage site, established as the Central Flying School in 1913 as the first military flying base in Australia and just ten years after the world's first powered flight. It is a unique site world wide, given its Australian Flying Corps and pre-World War One airfield hangars and buildings, seaplane base on the Southern Tarmac and the original living quarters. It exemplifies ongoing development through the 'flying boat' 1920s and 'golden age' of the 1930s through to its collection of World War Two buildings on the Northern Tarmac.

Point Cook is not only the birthplace of military aviation and the RAAF, it is also the cradle of Australian aviation as the Defence Department-regulated and controlled civil aviation until the late 1930s with civil pilot and engineering training, along with aircraft certification being undertaken at Point Cook. Hence, it played an important part in the nation's military and civil aviation development during the 1920s and 1930s.

It was the departure point for the first north-south and non-stop east-west crossings, the first aerial circumnavigation of the continent, the first international flight from Australia and the centre for pilot and engineering training within Australia for many years.

It is associated with many famous Australian military and civil aviation names such as Williams, Merz, Smith Brothers, Kingsford-Smith and Ulm and has played a major role in recruitment, training and instilling Air Force traditions and culture.

Since 1913, its airfield has acted as a natural buffer to the adjoining migratory water bird habitats to the east and the site remains a buffer to the approaching residential estates to the north west and agricultural activities to the south west.

The Society considers that most appropriate way to preserve and maintain this important national heritage site is through transfer and ongoing operation by a public community trust for the benefit of the nation and all Australians.

A TRUST TO MANAGE THE POINT COOK AIR FORCE BASE

The Australian Government will soon hand over the management of the historically significant Air Force base at Point Cook. The base is recognised on the National Heritage List as one of the 126 places of outstanding historic, natural or indigenous significance to the nation. It sits alongside the Sydney Opera House, the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the Great Barrier Reef as a part of what makes Australia unique in the world. The Government has announced that it will explore partnerships with heritage organisations and trusts to support heritage protection strategies as part of its divestment of the site.

A community trust is the best model to ensure increased employment and heritage tourism benefits while also retaining the national heritage significance of the birthplace of the military aviation in Australia. Management by a community trust has many benefits, including:

- More appropriate use of the site than medium to high-housing and its consequent contribution to road congestion

- Sympathetic commercial development that brings employment to the area

- Opportunities for education institutions to establish a campus in the former RAAF College precinct

- Retention of the RAAF Museum with easier visitor access and improved facilities

- Community access for sport and recreation, as well as ongoing youth development through the defence cadet program

- Closer connection with the veterans' community for events and commemoration

- Congregation access for religious devotion in the historic RAAF Chapel of the Holy Trinity, as well as bookings for weddings

- Retention of the historic art deco officers' mess as a reception centre and hospitality venue

- Continued use of the airfield for RAAF Museum interactive heritage flying, light recreational aviation and vintage aircraft joy flights, with no net increase in aircraft operations, no jet aircraft operations and no increase in RMIT flying training rates

- Ensured environment conservation by retention of the open space buffer with the adjoining RAMSAR Treaty wetlands and environmentally sensitive Point Cook Coastal Park
- Further integration with the Wyndham heritage and environment tourism attractions of Werribee Park Mansion, Point Cook Homestead, Point Cook Coastal Park and the biennial Avalon International Airshow

As early as 1997, the Australian Government proposed divestment of the site and decided in 2004 to transfer it to a trust for use as a heritage tourism site, but it decided instead to retain the base for defence purposes. The transfer, then as now, would be in line with other notable examples of the transfer of former defence sites to trusts, such as the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust (1999) and the Point Nepean Community Trust (2003).

A community trust to manage the nationally significant Air Force base at Point Cook would be the best outcome to ensure greater community access, retain national heritage, protect the coastal environment and enhance Wyndham as a vibrant tourism destination.

Yours Sincerely,
David Prossor, President
Derek Buckmaster, Secretary
Aviation Historical Society of Australia, Inc.