

Western Sydney Airport: Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (21:56): I rise in support of my local Blue Mountains community, who are angry and concerned about the potential noise and environmental impacts of the proposed Western Sydney airport. I want to acknowledge the work being done to protect the community by the member for Blue Mountains, Trish Doyle; the Blue Mountains City Council; Mayor Mark Greenhill; the Labor candidate for Macquarie, Susan Templeman; and hundreds of local citizens.

I have written to the Deputy Prime Minister, Warren Truss, and to the Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, seeking a meeting so that I can express the concerns of my community. If the coalition government accepts the flight plan proposed in the flawed environmental impact statement it would be an act of social and environmental vandalism. It would also mean a decade of uncertainty for Blue Mountains residents. The EIS does not take into account the current residential amenity of the Blue Mountains. Nor does it properly account for the fact that the Blue Mountains lies within a World Heritage Area. An airport in Western Sydney must not be built under the conditions of the flawed EIS.

The test for any Western Sydney airport must be that it contributes to employment and economic growth in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. According to the draft EIS, the Blue Mountains will 'suffer a negative impact with major consequences of a very high significance rating'. In terms of lifestyle and amenity disadvantage, the EIS rates the lower Blue Mountains the same as Badgerys Creek and other communities in very close proximity to the proposed airport. Residents in the lower Blue Mountains are bewildered that all landings at the airport will be funnelled into a merge point above Blaxland and surrounding villages. These are areas of comparatively high residential density. They are also calling for an extension of the consultation period so that detailed submissions can be made. Around 600 residents met in Blaxland this month as a result of the arrogant disregard for their welfare in the draft environmental impact statement.

People live in and visit the Blue Mountains for the unique environment, the peace and quiet and the clean air. By 2030 the effect on lower mountains residents arising from the flight tracks and merge point would mean 70 audible overflights per day. No one expected that the residential amenity of Blaxland would be destroyed by up to 275 overflights each day by 2050. That is up to 150 flights during the day, up to 50 flights in the evening and up to 75 flights during the night. This would mean no respite for families under the merge point and flight path.

The issue of flight noise must be understood in the context of the extremely low background noise in the Blue Mountains. Moving from minimal background noise to up to 60 decibels—initially 20 to 30 times per night—is a massive impact on Blue Mountains residents. The World Health Organization notes that an external 55 decibels is when people start to become annoyed with aircraft noise.

In recognition that aircraft noise is more intrusive at night, the European authorities enforce a 10-decibel penalty for night flights and a five-decibel penalty for evening flights. This means that the effective noise level in the Blue Mountains at night would be the equivalent of 65 decibels. This is well above the European annoyance level and twice as loud as 55 DBA. According to the EIS, the landing flight paths are designed to optimise the

CHAMBER

112 SENATE Monday, 23 November 2015

productivity and efficiency of the airport and reduce fuel costs for the airlines. These interests should never override the amenity, lifestyle and health of the community.

I have spent most of my working life representing blue-collar workers and fighting for their jobs. I understand the importance of employment creation and economic growth. Nevertheless, a good society must consider environmental and lifestyle issues associated with economic

growth. The Blue Mountains community should not be the dumping ground for the problems associated with an airport that we are told will benefit the whole of Australia. Airport and airline efficiency and profitability must be balanced against the lifestyle and amenity of existing long-established communities.

The Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, should reject the draft environmental impact statement. I call on the government to propose flight paths that share the noise more equitably and enforce a night-time curfew on landings. The proposals that I am advocating are not unique in either Australian or international airport operations.

It is not beyond the technological capacity of Airservices Australia to devise flight plans that minimise the noise impact on Blue Mountains residents, protect the World Heritage area and are consistent with their own published principles and commitments.

It is very important that claims about noise mitigation and technological advancements are viewed with a sceptical eye and are subject to critical analysis. The optimistic assertions contained in the draft EIS of reductions in future aircraft noise pollution are not backed up by technological evidence. The reality is much of the current and new fleet will be operating within their existing noise footprint for many decades to come.

I am of the view that the Abbott government decision to build at Badgery's Creek cannot be a blank cheque to proceed at any cost to the community. The community should be given more time to make submissions on the environmental impact statement. The EIS does not fairly or equitably balance the needs and concerns of Blue Mountains residents against the needs of the airport. The flight-path proposals contained in the EIS do not meet Airservices Australia's published commitment and principles, including the need for proactive community engagement, consultation and information.

The EIS is inconsistent with Airservices Australia's stated objective of the alignment of actions and processes to the International Civil Aviation Organization Balanced Approach to Noise Management. ASA has failed to apply ICAO principles on noise concentration, noise

management, and night and weekend sensitivity. Changes to the flight plan and merge points need to be made and become compulsory in any future airport operation. The low ambient noise in the Blue Mountains means that aircraft noise involves a significant degradation of the quality of life for residents. The operational plan must include a curfew for Badgerys Creek airport consistent with the Sydney Airport curfew that provides the Eastern Suburbs and the inner west respite from airline noise.

It is unacceptable that the final decisions on flight paths and merge points could be left unresolved for up to a decade. Furthermore, the government should establish a Western Sydney community aviation consultative forum to ensure that the views of the community are considered when implementing decisions. They should provide financial support to affected councils to fund independent analysis of environmental impact statements. They should implement a decibel weighting system for evening and night flights similar to the European, Canadian and New Zealand approach.

They should implement aircraft noise monitoring and aircraft mitigation measures that deal with community concern over noise, emissions, operating assumptions and air space design parameters. The government should make information available to the public as to the level and duration of noise and the distance noise will travel from these overflights. They should establish an independent dispute-resolution body to consider policy and operational issues arising from the construction and operation of the airport. They should build a rail link from Penrith to the airport. They should bring forward the rollout of the NBN to the lower mountains.

The negative impacts of the proposed Western Sydney Airport should not be disproportionately borne by the community of the Blue Mountains as a result of inadequate environmental impact statements or a political determination to build the airport at any cost. I do not oppose a new airport. I oppose an airport built on the flawed assumptions, conclusions and recommendations of the EIS.