

**Meeting on Western Sydney International Airport Draft Flightpaths  
Advisors to the Federal Minister for Transport, 12 noon, 26 September 2024**

**Purpose** To brief the Federal Minister for Transport on the concerns of residents of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains on the impact of aircraft noise on communities and natural areas and proposed solutions.

**Recommendations**

- (1) That the Minister immediately seek Cabinet approval to direct the Department of Transport and Air Services Australia to:
- develop new aircraft noise standards based on ground noise levels
  - redesign all flight paths in the Greater Sydney Basin, including those from Kingsford Smith Airport, prior to the opening of the Western Sydney Airport to reduce flight path impacts on all affected residents and the natural environment
  - prepare legislation to introduce a curfew (11pm to 6am) and long-term operating plan with movement flight caps for Western Sydney International Airport and its flightpaths prior to its opening in late 2026
  - prepare legislation that restricts aircraft flights over declared national parks including the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and areas of high biodiversity (e.g. Burratorang State Conservation Area), to a height of 30,000 feet, except for emergency aircraft
  - develop a package of just compensation for those who will be affected by the opening of the airport including insulation for those homes and facilities that will be significantly affected by aircraft noise, and buy backs of homes and land where, due to rezoning or proximity to the airport, sale is unlikely
  - urgently progress high speed rail connecting our east coast capital cities to reduce the need for expansion of airports and additional runways, and to reduce the number of flights needed in the future.

**Background**

Over 8400 submissions were received in response to the draft EIS for the preliminary flight paths for WSI Airport. Of these nearly 5000 submissions raised concerns about aircraft noise (1:5 related to sleep); nearly 3500 submissions raised concerns about the social impact and impact on human health, respectively; and nearly 1500 submission raised concerns about Matters of National Environmental Significance.<sup>i</sup>

In February 2017, the now Prime Minister in a speech to a Western Sydney Aerotropolis Summit said that *“Last year, Bill Shorten and I announced Labor’s plan for a no-fly zone between 11pm and 6am. It will be possible to ensure simultaneous operations for take offs and landings to the south-west of the runway, stopping flights over residential communities at night”*.<sup>ii</sup>

The Federal Government released its Aviation White Paper on 26 August 2024. In doing so it pre-empted the outcomes of the Senate Inquiry into the Impact and Mitigation of Aircraft Noise and the draft EIS process on proposed flightpaths for Western Sydney Airport, neither of which have been finalised.

The Aviation White Paper (and Green Paper) ruled out curfews, movement caps, and any other operating restrictions at Australian airports where they do not already exist, stating “a clear policy stance on this issue is important to provide certainty for capital investment in airport assets”.<sup>iii</sup> In doing so, the Federal Government has:

- Rejected the United Nations’ International Civil Aviation Organisation’s, *Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management*, the goal of which is “to address noise problems on an **individual airport** basis and to identify the noise-related measures that achieve **maximum environmental benefit** most cost-effectively using objective and measurable criteria” (emphasis added).<sup>iv</sup> Australia is a member of the UN.
- Constrained the community’s ability to influence decisions about the best approach to reducing the impact of aircraft noise on communities and the natural environment generally and in relation to specific airport developments like Western Sydney.
- Put the economic and commercial interests of the aviation industry above public health issues from aircraft noise, air and water contamination as well as environmental and climate concerns.

The EIS on the draft flightpaths for Western Sydney was prepared on the basis that the Government had determined that the airport would operate 24/7, 365 days a year. This policy position was determined without any community consultation and has the effect of:

- denying the electorate a meaningful say in how best to reduce the impact of aircraft noise arising from the draft flightpaths on people and the environment particularly the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and Burragorang State Conservation Area,
- denying Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains the noise protections afforded communities affected by Kingsford Smith Airport - a legislated 11pm to 6am curfew, movement caps and long-term operating plan,
- preventing public servants from doing their job, providing frank and fearless advice in response to consultation on the draft flightpaths and how best to mitigate their noise impacts.<sup>v</sup>

The science is conclusive. Aircraft noise is detrimental to human health, educational outcomes, and the health of wildlife populations, including birds.<sup>vi</sup> Sleep deprivation is known to contribute to numerous health issues and directly responsible for deaths on the road and in the workplace.

Denying the science will result in significant disadvantage to thousands of people. It will result in a decline in productivity, and a financial burden, with respect to those people. It will result in a significant financial cost to the health system, to the education system, and to the budget bottom line.

Denying the science will see Australia with **two** World Heritage Areas (the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef) at risk of being placed on the red list with vast sums of taxpayer money being squandered to prevent this from occurring by flying politicians and public servants around the world to lobby against this outcome. It was the original proposal for an airport at Badgerys Creek that delayed the listing of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area in 1999.<sup>vii</sup>

World Heritage properties are of international importance and that their protection is a collective responsibility shared by governments, private sector and the wider community. By signing UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Australia has pledged to protect and conserve World Heritage. This means that the Federal Government has

“...an obligation to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations their cultural and natural heritage, as well as ensuring that the heritage has a function in the life of the community. Decisions about any proposed actions should ensure the protection and conservation of the Outstanding Universal Value of their World Heritage properties. In turn, this may require protection of other heritage/conservation values.”<sup>viii</sup>

### **Who we are:**

We represent the residents of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains concerned about the impact of Western Sydney International airport and its associated flightpaths on the lives of people and the environment including the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) is a 60-year-old organisation with over 850 members and a strong history of successful conservation of the Blue Mountains environment. BMCS was instrumental in writing the scientific document submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, leading to a successful nomination in 2000.

Residents Against Western Sydney Airport was established in 2015 following the announcement by the then Prime Minister that Western Sydney Airport would be built. We aim to provide the public with researched and balanced information on the social and environmental impacts from the construction of a 24-hour airport in Western Sydney. We represent over 3000 supporters and members.

### **Contacts**

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<sup>i</sup> Sourced 25/9/24 at <https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/pdf-documents/draft-eis-submissions-overview-may-25.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Sourced 25/9/24 at <https://anthonyalbanese.com.au/speech-to-western-sydney-aerotropolis-summit>

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Government (2024), Aviation White Paper – Towards 2050, p.156

<sup>iv</sup> Sourced 16/9/24 at <https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Pages/noise.aspx>

<sup>v</sup> See Andrew Podger’s Report to the Robodebt Royal Commission for a discussion on issues relating to the Australian Public Service and the provision of ‘frank and fearless’ advice to Ministers and the Australian Parliament. Sourced 16/9/24 at <https://robodebt.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-02/andrew-podger-report-to-robodebt-royal-commission.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (2022), *Noise, Blazes and Mismatches: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*, Nairobi. Sourced 16/9/24 at <https://www.unep.org/resources/frontiers-2022-noise-blazes-and-mismatches>

<sup>vii</sup> Sourced 16/9/24 at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/917>

<sup>viii</sup> Sourced 25/9/24 at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidance-toolkit-impact-assessments/>