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## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IN PLANNING FOR A NEW AIRPORT

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As debate about Badgery's Creek as an airport site continues, a vision emerges of "budget" airlines minimising their costs and passengers' fares by flying "no frills" services. The airport will open with a limited impact on surrounding areas but that would grow steadily. For many years, most Sydney flights will still go to and from Mascot.

Projecting straight lines in various directions from the Badgery's Creek site, one finds that many possible flight paths go over national parks, dedicated water catchment areas and small communities heavily reliant on tourism and other activities that depend on the pristine condition of the natural environment.

The impacts of aviation on other activities arise from the number of flights, the noisiness of individual aircraft types and the usual altitude at which particular regions are overflown. The regions of the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly have suffered relatively little from Mascot activities because many Mascot flights do not overfly them and those that do maintain a relatively high altitude. As an airport at Badgery's Creek expanded its operations, this would change.

The most obvious impact from low altitude flying is noise. While curfews and construction techniques such as double glazing windows are used in populated areas near airports, life cannot go on as before. This would be especially impactful in areas whose reputation with tourists depends on being quiet and natural. In aircraft operations, procedures such as "fuel dumping" can sometimes be necessary and effects on natural areas below cannot always be avoided. In the worst scenario, if even a small aircraft crashes or makes an emergency landing in a natural area, massive disruption could be caused by search, rescue and recovery operations.

The economics of maintaining higher altitudes to minimise risk is influenced by the surface topography on the approaches to an airport site. The accompanying diagram shows the approximate changes in distance above sea level on various straight line routes radiating from the Badgery's Creek site and passing over or near large natural areas and water catchment areas.

Federal MPs such as Louise Markus (Member for Macquarie) are part of a group being consulted by the Prime Minister on the future of the Badgery's Creek site. The diagram reveals that the corridor between Badgery's Creek and the upper Blue Mountains would be particularly susceptible to low altitude overflight. It would be interesting to know the attitude of Ms Markus and her colleagues to gaining guarantees against the use of flight paths that would be highly damaging to susceptible areas.



