



MEDIA RELEASE

AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA *OVER 50 YEARS AS THE VOICE OF GENERAL AVIATION IN AUSTRALIA*

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For Immediate Release

General Aviation

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association fully supports Save Our Secondary Airports, the group that is campaigning about unjust practices against general aviation operators at Bankstown, Archerfield and Jandakot Airports. They are not a minority voice, but appear to speak for the majority of operators based at these airports, which have similar problems, and are growing in members, support base and stature.

“Just a few years ago, naming Bankstown Airport as an example, GA was thriving – the airport was rated the busiest in the southern hemisphere.” says AOPA President Col Rodgers “In those days you’d be hard pressed to find a parking spot for your aircraft once you landed. Photographs from those days show at least 250-300 aircraft parked on the airport. These days you could walk around with your eyes shut and probably not run into an aircraft!”

“AOPA believes that a once viable training airport has been downgraded in favour of property development,” said Rodgers. “Management at Bankstown also want heavy freight, I wonder what local residents will say when the quiet hum of small training aircraft is replaced by heavy four-engined aircraft, even jets, operating around the clock!!”

“The costs imposed by airport management make basing an aircraft at Bankstown unviable. This is not just a loss of aircraft to flying schools; it is a loss of revenue for the refuellers, the maintainers and even Airservices Australia because aircraft have been lost to Bankstown. The facilities at the airport also have a major influence on servicing and maintenance of aircraft used by Aerial Ambulance, Royal Flying Doctor, Police, Emergency services and other public entities. This impacts on local jobs and apprenticeship opportunities as well as businesses in and around the airport. There are hundreds more aircraft missing from here, I wonder where they have gone??”

“Airport management cannot deny our information that puts the decline in aviation fuel sales at Bankstown over the last four years at an average of 50%” said Rodgers.

AOPA is deeply concerned at the impact of a failed Government policy, that of handing the management of airports to private operators. AOPA does not believe these operators have the interests of aviation or the local community at heart and see the airport simply as land to be developed. Airports are affected across Australia; Jandakot, Archerfield, Moorabbin, Camden and Bankstown are just the beginning. All Australian airports are potentially at risk; property developers see only dollars, not national assets.

AOPA is calling on Minister Truss to intervene and set stringent rules for rent increases, land reuse and runway closures. “We only want to see runway closures happen with the full agreement of local operators at any airports, the loss of the North-South runway at Bankstown was much more than a land grab, it is simply dangerous and may result in a loss of life,” said Rodgers. “It also significantly detracts from the use of Bankstown as a training airport.”

“We don’t think DoTARS looked at the issues properly when the program was first developed and we have had advice to that effect from Government sources in the past. What we want now is a stop to airport destruction and a rewriting of the rules by which they are governed.”

“The Government has called for an action agenda, well this is the first item’ said Rodgers. “This needs fixing now or Australia will be denied the benefits of a thriving aviation sector. Look around Sydney and count the number of golf courses, racecourses, parks, nature reserves and playing fields, then count the number of GA airfields – only three, and one (Hoxton Park) is closing in 2008.”

The Bankstown Airport situation clearly illustrates the lack of a national cohesive Aviation Infrastructure policy at both Federal and State levels. General Aviation is a core part of a major industry that has immense community benefit, and should not be left at the mercy of short-term financial gain.

The prominent aviatrix, Nancy Bird Walton, is also concerned at the apparent attack on general aviation, and is prepared to lend her support to any action that will foster and promote general aviation.

We feel it is now time for people to stand up and be counted in regard to preservation of our national assets.

For More Information

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