

Our  
disappearing  
aviation

## Evans Head

Dr Richard Gates, President of the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Committee, says his group still needs help to fend off a voracious council.

The State Heritage-listed Evans Head Memorial aerodrome and Casino aerodrome in northern NSW remain under serious threat.

It's hard to escape the conclusion that the Richmond Valley Council council that owns them has set out to deliberately destroy these important regional aviation facilities so it can build houses on them and increase its rate base.

The current mayor has made it clear his vision for the Evans Head aerodrome is housing.

The same mayor was at the helm when the council sold off, behind closed doors, 120ha of the Casino aerodrome including a terminal building worth \$800,000 to a private developer for \$660,000 (on a down payment of \$160,000 and five annual interest free payments of \$100,000). It was worth three times that amount.

The council's efforts to do away with the two aerodromes are aided by the Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, which does nothing to enforce the Transfer Deeds.

And NSW Premier Kristina Keneally, when she was Planning Minister, approved rezoning part of Evans Head aerodrome for a retirement village, right near the main runway. That was in spite of an independent assessment which showed it would create a land use planning conflict.

Ms Keneally ignored that advice..

She also set out to marginalise the committee we had set up years before to manage the aerodrome. She claimed, incorrectly, it had been set up just to stop the retirement village. And once the negative stuff was out there, it is very difficult to undo the damage.

We wrote to Ms Keneally many times asking her to correct the record but she's failed to do so.

Casino continues to be under threat to drag racing and housing development. The council has now approved 423 long term residential sites and 103 manufactured home sites alongside the aerodrome, a planning no-no. Housing is going ahead at the end of the main runway which now has a barbed wire fence across it.



Western end of Casino main runway taken December 2010

And the council is allowing regular drag racing, which is not only damaging the strip and surrounds, but closing the aerodrome to aeroplanes for days at a time.

Council's solicitor has provided advice that it's not a problem. Things are looking pretty serious at Evans Head too. The state government's so-called independent Joint Regional Planning Panel has approved a Development Application and an Environment Impact Statement for decontaminating part of the aerodrome set aside for a retirement village.

The panel wouldn't admit the application was for the benefit of the retirement village despite evidence to the contrary. And we weren't allowed to challenge serious errors of fact contained in Richmond Valley Council's assessment including the fact that the area on the aerodrome where the contaminated soil is to be dumped is a designated camping area used for the Great Eastern Fly-In. The dumping will render it unfit for camping.

The best part of all was when they accepted a council report that approval had been given by the Heritage Branch for the work to be done. Evidence from Heritage in their own report to the council showed that no application had been made.

Needless to say we weren't happy with the JRPP process and have lodged a formal complaint under their Code of Conduct. In our view there was significant bias

favouring the council.

There is little doubt there is heavy political interference in the planning processes for the Evans Head Memorial aerodrome with Richmond Valley Council actively shepherding the retirement village development.

The notion there is arms length assessment and fair play is just nonsense. By our reckoning the cost of the contamination clean-up to ratepayers will be more than \$4 million, all to benefit a private retirement village to be built near the main runway.

It is obviously a Trojan Horse for future residential development and a clear breach of the Transfer Deed over the aerodrome.

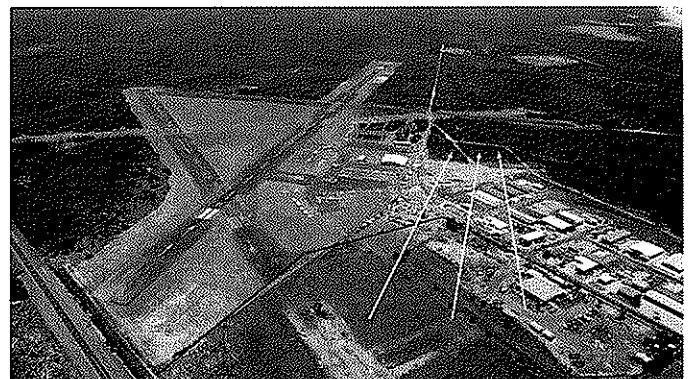
#### WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Evans Head is a litmus test and potential precedent for the future of regional aviation in Australia.

If the council and the state government push through the retirement village without challenge from the aviation community and those who use regional aviation infrastructure, it will set a precedent for the rest of the country.

We are now looking to legal action to stop this from happening. We will need the community's assistance to do so. Can you help us?

If you can help, contact Richard at [ragates@netspace.net.au](mailto:ragates@netspace.net.au)



Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome. Contaminated soil is to be taken from the site outlined in red, the site for the proposed retirement village, to the area indicated by the yellow arrows. Most of the contamination comes from Council work practices on its Depot site. Note the proximity of the site for the retirement village to the main runway and how council has carved off part of 14/32 for housing development.