



Airport Development Consultation Guidelines

Airports Act 1996



October 2012

GLOSSARY

Airports Act	<i>Airports Act 1996</i>
ALC	airport-lessee company ¹
CACG	Community Aviation Consultation Group
Department	the Department of Infrastructure and Government
landside	the part of the airport grounds, and the part of the airport buildings, to which the non-travelling public has free access
MDP	major development plan ²
Minister	the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
MP	master plan ³
PCF	Planning Coordination Forum
stakeholder	a person or organisation such as a member of the public, airport user, or a government department or agency that has an interest in, or may be affected by, on-airport land use development

¹ Means an 'airport-lessee company' as defined by the Airports Act and for the purposes of this document an airport-management company, where appropriate.

² Means a major development plan under Division 4 of Part 5 of the Airports Act.

³ Means a master plan under Division 3 of Part 5 of the Airports Act.

INTRODUCTION

All leased federal airports (except for Mount Isa and Tennant Creek) are subject to a planning framework in the Airports Act. As part of the planning framework, ALCs are required to prepare a MP that incorporates an environment strategy and MDPs for major developments. To facilitate these processes ALCs are required to undertake regular and ongoing consultation with airport users, state/territory governments, local authorities, and the community to improve information sharing and strengthen planning and development outcomes.

Airport consultation groups such as CACGs and PCFs are useful mechanisms to ensure appropriate engagement on airport planning and operations, however they do not replace broader public consultation as required under the Airports Act. Guidelines for CACGs and PCFs are available on the Departments website.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

The aim of the Guidelines is to promote a shared understanding of how consultation processes in relation to land use, planning and developments at the leased federal airports should be managed – with particular emphasis on the preparation of MPs and MDPs.

These Guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive, nor provide an exhaustive list of information on matters that should be taken into account, or dictate the types of consultation that should be undertaken. These Guidelines seek to provide a useful reference to ALCs on mechanisms for ensuring that an appropriate level of effective consultation occurs. While the methods of consultation detailed are based on generally recognised practices and procedures, it is acknowledged that other methods may be equally appropriate.

PUBLIC COMMENT & ASSESSMENT PERIODS

The following summarises the public comment and assessment periods under the Airports Act for MPs, MDPs and any variations to these documents:

Public comment on draft.....	60 business ⁴ days
Assessment of draft.....	50 business days
Public comment on minor variation	15 business days
Assessment of minor variation	50 business days
Publication of approved final plan/strategy or variation	50 business days

⁴ A *business day* is defined in the Airports Act as being a day that is not a Saturday, a Sunday, a public holiday in the place where the airport is situated or the Australian Capital Territory or a day between 27 and 31 December.

GOALS OF CONSULTATION

The conduct of an effective consultation program does not necessarily mean that all interested parties will be satisfied with the outcome. Rather, it is about ensuring that a proposal has been fully explored, concerns identified and alternatives considered. Stakeholder consultation and education should be viewed as an integral part of the airport planning/environmental management process, with the major goals of a consultation strategy being:

- i) information goals – to inform stakeholders about on-airport land use, planning and developments; get input on alternative approaches and options; who will be responsible for making decisions; and what the ALC has done, is doing and plans to do;
- ii) ALC goals – to build and maintain transparent and stakeholder focused relationships;
- iii) legal goals – to meet the ALC's legal and regulatory obligations; and
- iv) process goals – to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to influence the views of key decision makers.

Parties involved in a consultation process need to be aware that:

- i) ultimately the decision whether to approve or refuse to approve a draft MP or MDP under the Airports Act is a statutory decision made by the Minister; and
- ii) subject to meeting all statutory approval processes, final approval for those airport developments that do not require a MDP is a matter for the ALC.

Benefits of consultation

Simply distributing information without regard for the complexities and uncertainties of the issues does not ensure effective consultation and communication. A well considered and clearly articulated consultation plan will help ensure that messages and actions are constructively formulated, communicated and received. It may involve targeted approaches to key stakeholders as well as public engagement.

While the benefits of effective, educative consultation may be wide and varied, the primary benefits include:

- i) providing a conduit for information exchange between stakeholders and ALCs;
- ii) gaining different ideas, perspectives and viewpoints;
- iii) providing an opportunity to identify specific areas of misunderstanding, disparity and agreement;
- iv) ensuring an informed understanding with regard to the impacts of any proposed development;
- v) demonstrating a commitment to transparency and accountability; and
- vi) fostering a sense of ownership in the process for the parties consulted by having views and alternative options considered carefully and responded to.

Concerns about consultation

For varying reasons some ALCs and stakeholders could have concerns about certain consultation processes, such as:

- i) the comment/feedback provided may be contrary to their views or interests;
- ii) issues and responses may not fit easily with their present thinking;
- iii) the process could be dominated by a particular group or groups;
- iv) the process will be overwhelmed by the number of conflicting views; and
- v) a balanced outcome that meets the needs of all groups is unlikely due to competing demands.

Despite such apprehensions, consultation must be conducted in a way that genuinely engages other viewpoints. It must not be seen as a process that occurs after the 'real' decision has been made. Similarly, consultation should not be used to manipulate support or to meet minimum process standards (i.e. "Yes, we did consult"). Rather, genuine consultation should be looked upon by all parties as an opportunity to obtain further ideas and options before a proposal has been finalised and may involve recurrent interaction with affected sectors of industry, the community, government agencies and other key stakeholders.

When to consult

An important factor in meeting the aim and objectives of the Guidelines is that consultation is seen as a continual process (i.e. there is a culture of consultation) which provides for stakeholders to be kept informed about developments at the leased federal airports. That is, the consultation process should extend beyond what is required under the Airports Act and embrace all significant on-airport building activities.

Airport consultation groups such as the CACG and PCFs provide useful forums for on-going discussion on proposed developments on the airport site and any likely community impacts. The CACG in particular is one mechanism that can be used to engage with the community on airport planning, operations and related issues during the planning process and on an ongoing basis.

Further, given the key economic, social and transportation function airports provide it is considered that the sharing of information within the community helps manage expectations, breakdown potential barriers and develop good neighbourly relations.

Preparatory consultation

While consultation should be viewed as an on-going process, at a minimum it is seen as constructive for ALCs to initiate discussions with the various categories of persons set out in sections 80 (regarding MPs) and 93 (MDPs) of the Airports Act⁵ well before entering into the formal public comment process on the development of these documents. When considering whether to approve or refuse to approve a draft Plan, the Airports Act provides that the Minister must have regard to those consultations undertaken in preparing that document.

⁵ Such as a State or Territory government, an authority of a State or Territory, a local government body and, an airline or other user of the airport concerned.

PCFs and to a lesser extent CACGs are mechanisms ALCs can use to engage with the Commonwealth, state/territory and local government representatives early in the planning process to improve the coordination of planning for the airport site and surrounding areas.

ALCs are advised to commence the planning process and consultation early. This should include consultation with agencies that provide specialised input or advice into the planning process such as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), Airservices Australia (Airservices) and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC). Early commencement will provide for a reasonable time for any issues arising during consultation to be addressed and ensure the plans are submitted within the timeframe required by the statutory provisions of the Airports Act.

Public comment

Under sections 79 and 84A (regarding MPs) and 92 and 95A (MDPs) of the Airports Act ALCs are required to invite public comment on the draft version of their Plan.

Under the Airports Act, an ALC must publish a notice in a newspaper, circulating generally in the State or Territory in which the airport is located, advising that a draft Plan has been prepared. This notice is to state that, for the relevant number of days for comment required by the Airports Act, copies of the draft document will be available in an accessible electronic format via the airport web site at no cost, specify where paper copies can be inspected and purchased and, invite written comments. In order to facilitate recognition, it is preferable for each newspaper notice to include the respective airport logo and for the text to be in a prominent and easily found area of the newspaper and be of a size that is able to be read easily.

In addition to the CACG, PCF and meeting the consultation requirements provided for by the Airports Act, ALCs should be proactive in seeking out and adopting more extensive consultation structures, such as organising public meetings to facilitate information dissemination and exchange; arranging for displays and exhibitions such as stands in shopping centres and libraries where copies of the proposed Plan could be made available; distributing information bulletins to houses/businesses in neighbouring areas, being mindful of possible multi-lingual needs; maintaining interactive web pages; and keeping the community informed through print and electronic media.

CONSULTATION APPROACHES

In addition to CACGs and PCFs there is a range of consultation approaches that may be used in order to achieve effective dialogue with affected stakeholders during the planning process for developments, such as:

- i) public meetings – formalised proceedings aimed at presenting information to a large audience. These are highly visible and can be effective in enabling a wide range of views to be aired. There is a need to ensure that those who are most confident in putting their views across do not dominate the meeting, thereby discouraging interaction. Appointment of an experienced and respected chairperson/facilitator (including the use of independent chairpersons), coupled with suitable venues and at suitable times, may help ensure an effective exchange of information.

- ii) stakeholder meeting – meetings with groups/individuals who share a common interest, where specific issues of concern can be discussed in more detail than at public meetings.
- iii) focus group meetings – could bring together, in an informal atmosphere, people from diverse areas to help identify and analyse issues of concerns.
- iv) on-site meetings – enables interested individuals to gain a more practical understanding of the issues involved, and may also include visits to see a similar operation in practice.
- v) permanent or ad hoc consultative committees – provides on-going advice and feedback on proposals and could be utilised as a liaison/public relations tool.
- vi) submissions – preferably written (to avoid misrepresentation), to enable stakeholders to register their views and concerns. If a submission format is supplied by an ALC, it may include or be supplemented by a questionnaire.
- vii) individual discussions – provides a quick and efficient means of disseminating and receiving information, but limits the spread of information.

The choice of techniques will depend on a number of factors, including:

- i) the particular nature and location of the project, and the reasons leading stakeholders to be involved;
- ii) the nature of the stakeholder groups involved and their willingness to participate;
- iii) the likely impact that any development will have on the local community and environment; and
- iv) statutory time-lines.

Effective communication can also be facilitated by:

- i) identifying source materials that are referred to and provide access to those documents – for example, technical studies or reports such as economic impact statements and road traffic studies

Note : – the Australian Government expects that where extracts from a document are quoted, that document will be adequately referenced and the whole document made available as part of the public consultation process.

- ii) using the media to disseminate information;
- iii) providing additional information by way of newsletters, pamphlets, videos or through the internet;
- iv) exhibiting information at the airport passenger terminal(s) as well as in off-airport public buildings such as shopping centres and local libraries; and
- v) acknowledging receipt of individual and specific submissions, as opposed to the ‘form letter’ response.

CONCLUSION

Effective and on-going interaction with stakeholders is seen as an integral part of an ALC's consultation process, as it facilitates the dissemination of information, enables stakeholder input, may assist with the timely resolution of conflicts and generates solutions which are well understood and equitable.

It is preferable that the concerns of stakeholders be dealt with at the outset of any project, before they grow to become controversial issues requiring time and resource intensive resolution. Through proper planning and the implementation of effective consultation processes, involving all stakeholders, potential issues that may require additional communication and consultation with affected stakeholders should be identified.

ALCs and those stakeholders identified at sections 80 and 93 of the Airports Act should work collaboratively to ensure that early consideration is given to the environmental, economic and social goals within an airport's immediate region. Similarly, all supporting data is to be current, as well as accurate, with data gaps noted.

CONTACT DETAILS

For further information on these Guidelines, or other issues relating to the leased federal airports, please contact the Airports Branch, Department of Infrastructure and Transport on (02) 6274 7111 or www.infrastructure.gov.au.