

6 April 2011

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Airport Regulation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Commissioner,

RE: Productivity Commission Inquiry – Economic Regulation of Airport Services

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment into the inquiry of the economic regulatory arrangements at Australian airports. Darwin City Council welcomes recent changes introduced in the Airports Amendment Act 2010, in particular the requirement for airport master plans to align with State/Territory and Local Government planning laws.

As identified, the Darwin International Airport (DIA) is categorised within the 'second tier self-administered monitoring' regime and as such, Darwin City Council would recommend that price and quality of service, including customer satisfaction monitoring, is continued.

Darwin City Council recognises the importance of airports in helping achieve productive, liveable and sustainable cities for our communities. It is therefore vital that local government is involved in all future planning to ensure alignment and integration with all planning systems for the Darwin region including metropolitan plans underpinned by infrastructure, community, social and economic plans.

This is reinforced through the COAG Reform Council's review of the capital cities' strategic planning systems. A set of nine criteria were identified by COAG and cities' strategic planning systems have been critiqued against this criteria. Criterion five identifies the need to consider and strengthen the networks between capital cities and major regional centres, and other important domestic and international connections. Darwin City Council believes that the strategic planning system for the Darwin region should be closely linked with development at DIA.

Furthermore, Darwin City Council would recommend that airport master plans are regularly reviewed in line with the evaluation and review cycles of the COAG criteria for capital city strategic planning systems.

The DIA is a joint user with the Department of Defence and therefore operates 24x7 as the airport also serves as a logistical base for combat aircraft and exercise base.

This has caused some concern within the Darwin community, for example, discussions of new defence aircrafts and flight paths. Although Darwin City Council welcomes the proposed implementation of a Noise and Flight Path Monitoring System at DIA, this should not negate the need for up front consultation on any matters that may negatively affect our communities homes, workplaces and their suburban amenity.

In terms of integrated transport, DIA is not linked to any public transport systems. Residents need to rely on private transport or taxi with visitors also able to access the shuttle bus service. For the most part, this is reasonably effective based on current visitor arrival and departure numbers. However, situations do occur with flight arrivals coinciding with taxi change over times or at times of limited taxi availability (e.g. peak demand times during Fridays/Saturday nights). Long delays have been experienced which have not provided visitors with a good first impression of Darwin. This situation will only be exacerbated as passenger numbers increase.

It is noted within DIA's Masterplan 2010 that it is difficult to effectively service the airport with public transport given that a large number of flights occur between 11.00pm and 7.00am. Instead the Masterplan focuses on provision of vehicle parking spaces and the external and internal road networks to cater for increased passenger growth. This does not encourage sustainable behavioural change in line with the Australian Government's Urban Policy agenda and Darwin City Council's Environmental Sustainability goals.

Darwin City Council looks forward to the Productivity Commission's findings.

Yours sincerely

BRENDAN DOWD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER