

**AIRCRAFT NOISE OMBUDSMAN
REPORT ON FINGAL HEAD AIRCRAFT NOISE
September 2011 – Version 2**

Background

Over the past 6 months the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman's (ANO) office has received complaints about aircraft traffic over Fingal Head. While individual complaints have covered a range of issues the key matters that have been identified are:

- concerns about jet departures from Gold Coast Airport passing directly over Fingal Head, being departures from the southern end of the main runway and turning on a heading of 070, as documented¹ in Air Traffic Control procedures (Letter of Agreement 433);
- other aircraft traffic over Fingal Head, often from aircraft traversing up and down the coast, including both light aircraft and helicopters.

The concerns expressed by Fingal Head residents are based on both the noise disturbance that the aircraft create, and also on environmental concerns for wildlife and indigenous sacred sites. The residents have also raised safety as an issue, however this is an area outside the role and responsibility of the ANO. It is understood the safety concerns have been referred to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and that CASA are engaged with the Fingal Heads community.

Fingal Head Community Association (FHCA) perspective

The FHCA believes that it has never been under a flight path. FHCA have claimed that documents obtained by residents prior to purchase of their properties from the Tweed Shire Council verify this view.

The FHCA have argued that: *“The extension of the runway at the Gold Coast Airport in 2006 has resulted in aggressive activity by the Airport to increase the number of heavy jet operators and destinations as well as increase the number of smaller aircraft and training schools operating from the airport.”*

Further, the FHCA believes that the use of Fingal Head as a departure heading is in breach of planning laws and that full and proper environmental assessments, which take account of the environmental significance of the area and surrounds, have not been conducted, nor have they been consulted.

In summary, FHCA do not want any aircraft including general aviation aircraft, over the Fingal Head area.

¹ Note: Version 1 of this report included the word published in lieu of documented. This may have conveyed the meaning that the procedure was publicly available. Version 2 of this report has been amended to provide clarity.

The Issues

The wildlife and indigenous issues, not relating to noise, are outside the jurisdiction of the ANO. The noise concerns however, whether the effect is on the community, wildlife or indigenous areas, are within charter and can be divided into two issues:

1. Why can't aircraft departing Runway 14 and then tracking to the north or east avoid the area instead of turning left heading 070?
2. What can be done to reduce the number of light aircraft passing directly overhead?

Following informal discussions and email exchanges relating to noise issues with some residents of Fingal Head, the Ombudsman undertook to investigate further.

Trial of alternate departure headings

In 2010, Airservices Australia undertook a trial of alternative arrangements for some departures from the southern end of the main runway at Gold Coast Airport. Airservices Australia has advised the ANO office that the trial was driven by noise concerns rather than other environmental, efficiency, or safety factors. The focus of the trial was on those aircraft that departed to the south and then turned east on a heading of 070, directly over the Fingal Head community. Following environmental assessments, the trial arrangement was implemented with aircraft tracking on a heading of between 020 and 090 or continuing on runway heading until established over water.

Following conclusion of the trial (after approximately 8 months) the southern departures turning east reverted to the previous arrangement, namely using a heading of 070.

There has been no formal announcement of the outcome of the trial, nor of plans for use of alternate headings.

Action

In addition to informal discussions and email exchanges relating to noise issues with some residents of Fingal Head, the Ombudsman attended an Airport Noise Abatement Consultative Committee (ANACC) meeting at the Gold Coast. The Ombudsman also held discussions with airport management, Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the Airservices Australia control tower manager, and Airservices Australia head office staff. The Ombudsman followed this up with internal research about the trial and Airservices Australia's response to the complaints.

Current Position

Issue 1 – Why can't aircraft departing Runway 14 and then tracking to the north or east, avoid the area instead of turning left heading 070?

Airservices Australia has provided advice on the further work it is undertaking on the assessment of the departure trial conducted in 2010, including timelines for this work to be completed and related work reviewing the environmental assessments. Additionally, Airservices Australia has committed to continue engaging with the community and to make reports on these two matters available in due course.

Notwithstanding the work being undertaken by Airservices Australia, the FHCA submitted a letter to the Chairperson of the ANACC on the 10th March 2011 stating that the headings of 020 and 090 were not acceptable to the Fingal Head's community. Further, the FHCA consider that these headings still took aircraft too close to the Fingal Head community and posed a concern to cultural indigenous and environmentally sensitive sites

Issue 2 – What can be done to reduce the number of light aircraft passing directly overhead?

Airservices Australia has provided the following advice on this issue:

[The Unit Tower Manager for the air traffic control tower at Gold Coast airport] has held discussions with the following operators regarding the sensitivity of the Fingal area, including Leticia Spit, to aircraft over-flights at any level;

- Professional Helicopters
- Helibiz
- Careflight
- VH-CTC & VH-MTD operators
- Australian Wings Academy
- SeaWorld Aviation
- Helitours
- Air Gold Coast

All operators confirmed they comply with CAR 157 when conducting operations overland and all are very keen to limit their impact on the local community.

On 17 June 2011 [The Unit Tower Manager] held an Airservices Australia sponsored function and further discussed the Fingal issue with a few helicopter operators. These operators suggested they could review their standard altitudes for coastal transits as higher levels overwater will allow them to position marginally further to the east of the coast and still comply with their single engine overwater requirements. [The Unit Tower Manager] will follow up on this next time he speaks with them.

[The Unit Tower Manager] will follow up this information ... at future meetings held with Gold Coast General Aviation representatives.

Given that Airservices Australia is pursuing this issue actively the ANO office proposes to take no further action at this stage.

Timetable

Airservices Australia has provided a timetable for further action and the Ombudsman is satisfied that this is a reasonable timetable.

The FHCA however remain concerned that the timeframe provided by Airservices Australia would not allow the Fingal Head community to have “*information in time for the upcoming Gold Coast Airport Review² process*”. FHCA is further concerned that this places them at a disadvantage and will “*penalise community members ability to participate in the community consultation process*”. The ANO will ensure that Gold Coast Airport is aware of the body of work being undertaken by Airservices Australia and also the concerns of the FHCA.

Future Action

Airservices Australia is pursuing the issues facing Fingal Head residents. It is doing so as a priority. As such, it is appropriate that the Ombudsman allows Airservices Australia to address the outstanding complaint issues above. The ANO office will continue to monitor action by Airservices Australia and will follow up on earlier discussions, but at this stage the Ombudsman anticipates little intervention from his office given the actions proposed.

Ron Brent
Aircraft Noise Ombudsman

² The ANO is unaware of a ‘Gold Coast Airport Review’ and has assumed that the FHCA are referring to the tabling of the new draft Master Plan for Gold Coast Airport