



## **DARWIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GROUP**

### **Web Report No 29 – 30 July 2020**

held at

Board Room, Wirraway Business Centre, Darwin International Airport

#### **1. Welcome and apologies**

Chair Chris Bigg welcomed members to the 29th meeting of the Community Consultation Group. The Summary Record and Meeting Report of the meeting on 12 March 2020 had been previously settled by circulation. The aviation industry has been one of the most impacted industries globally by the COVID-19 pandemic, and this was the major theme of the meeting.

#### **2. Darwin Airport COVID-19 impact and response**

##### **Overview**

Darwin Airport CEO Tony Edmondstone spoke of the impact and challenges of COVID-19 to date at the airport, including that passenger numbers have dropped by 97%. He outlined the heightened cleaning regime and safety measures in place at the airport, and the close working relationship the airport has with the NT Department of Health. Members discussed the recent reopening of the NT border and the ever-evolving situation of declared COVID-19 hotspots.

##### **Airport operations**

Ross Baynes outlined the reduced terminal opening hours currently in place, however emphasised that there is still a 24/7 airside presence. He went on to explain Darwin Airport's role in facilitating NT Health's COVID-19 screening procedures of passengers. Dawn Lawrie suggested NT Health officers who are meeting arriving passengers should be very clearly identified.

COVID-19 hygiene and cleaning measures in the airport terminal include: disinfecting and deep cleaning of all touchpoints during interstate arrival flights; hand sanitiser stations throughout the terminal; disinfectant spray cleaning in the terminal; disinfecting wipes at baggage trolley stations; UV sanitation units installed on escalator hand rails.

An extensive COVID-19 communications package has been developed and is regularly updated to ensure passengers are well-informed. This includes signage throughout the terminal and website/social media updates.

##### **Property development**

Ross Baynes summarised Darwin Airport's property and stakeholder management COVID-19 strategy, comprising: a weekly email stakeholder update; adoption of the National Code of Conduct for rental relief; working with tenants on reopening plans including marketing assistance; continuing to liaise with all stakeholders through this crisis.

In property projects, the Liquor Act Amendment Bill has been passed by NT Government, removing the prior uncertainty around transfer of a liquor licence. The Bagot Road (Dan Murphy's) proposed development is currently in the appeals process, and Darwin Airport continues to engage with the community and indigenous groups surrounding the airport. The proposed Bagot Rd / Totem Rd / Osgood Dve intersection upgrade is conditional on the Bagot Road development going ahead (DIPL will be the developer).

The freight and cold storage facility is due to be completed in September.

### **Aviation development**

Allan Woo briefed members on the aviation recovery outlook due to COVID-19:

- Aviation capacity is slowly returning, with the outlook much more positive than a few months ago. In May the available seat capacity for Darwin Airport was down -90% (with the remaining 10% being flights supported by the Australian and NT governments). In August this is forecast to improve to -66%.
- It is difficult for airlines to forward plan in the current COVID-19 climate, and as such flight schedules are evolving and we expect changes and adjustments regularly.
- Darwin's connectivity to other capital cities is good, and regional connectivity remains strong. This has been made possible through the Australian and NT governments' support packages.

Darwin Airport's aviation development focus is: Recovery of domestic capacity and connections; recovery of international capacity and connections; recovering demand (through partnerships with airlines, tourism, airports, travel trade); attracting new competition and routes. It is expected that post COVID-19 the aviation environment will be different to how it was before, such as travel bubbles and more city pairs opening up.

### **Commercial and ground transport**

Shane de Wit spoke of the airport's strong focus and support for its business partners during COVID-19, including rent relief, providing support for retailers as they commence trading again, and providing a good level of customer experience. Recent commercial initiatives include:

- Duty free retailer Lotte has opened a new pop-up store in the terminal.
- The online car parking booking engine has been upgraded to offer hourly parking.
- The airport has recently hosted three drive-in movie nights in the short-stay car park. All three sold out very quickly and were positively received.
- DIA is investigating an online retail store.

Dawn Lawrie thanked Shane for responding to her previous query relating to disabled parking. Dawn also commented on the distance to the car rental car park from the terminal for those with reduced mobility.

## **3. Defence update**

### **RAAF Base operational update**

WGCDR Andrew Anthony gave an update on military activities at RAAF Base Darwin:

- The Marine Rotational Force Darwin (MRF-D) has arrived in 4 tranches, with an extremely conservative approach to quarantine. This year there will be no air combat element.
- An exercise comprising 5 rotations of US Air Force tankers is scheduled for August and September 2020.

- Pitch Black 2020 has been cancelled. No other exercises are confirmed at this stage.
- It has recently been announced that a US funded strategic fuel reserve is to be built in Darwin.

SQNLDR Craig Sedgman spoke on development projects at RAAF Base Darwin, including aircraft parking, fuel tanks, aircraft wash station, new hangar and apron for P-8A aircraft. Construction of the solar farm is progressing, as are a range of electrical upgrades.

### **Air Traffic Control**

SQNLDR James Lee provided a short brief on the impact COVID-19 has had on aircraft movements at Darwin Airport from an air traffic control perspective. The initial escalation of COVID-19 in March 2020 saw a 66% drop in regular weekday aircraft movements. Since then there has been a very gradual increase in aircraft traffic, and the airport is currently back to about 60-70% of pre-COVID traffic. During April, May and June 2020 no air traffic control was provided between 10pm-6am, and instead common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) procedures were in place during these time periods.

Construction of the new air traffic control tower is expected to be completed in mid-2021, with operations expected to relocate to the new tower in 2023-24.

### **Defence Support Report**

John Cox explained there is extensive project activity underway at RAAF Base Darwin and other NT bases. Of late, John has been primarily involved with the Defence stimulus program that is also supporting local businesses. Defence's weed and fire management programs for RAAF Base Darwin have been completed for FY2020, John will provide further information at the next meeting.

## **4. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications**

Helen Gannon advised that over recent months the Airports Branch has been delivering COVID-19 funding programs or working on other support measures. However, business as usual is slowly returning to normal. Some of the support measures include:

- Repatriation flights program (\$130M) – now closed
- International freight assistance program (\$110M)
- Underwriting a minimum domestic aviation network (\$165M) to service the most critical metropolitan and regional routes in Australia.
- Australian Airlines Financial Relief Package (\$715M) providing rebates on fuel excise, domestic security charges and Airservices Australia charges.
- Regional Airlines Funding Assistance program (\$100M) – support for regional air service operators feeling the impacts of COVID-19.
- Regional Airline Network Support program (\$198M) – to ensure regional communities continue to receive essential air services.
- Assistance for Federally Leased Airports to seek partial relief from land tax charges to 31 December 2020, in line with state government land tax relief arrangements.

## **5. Community Consultation Group member issues**

Airservices' presentation (circulated via email prior to the meeting) was reviewed and members were asked to provide any feedback to Victoria Moore to pass onto Airservices.

Lesley Alford told members of a recent field trip by the NT Field Naturalists' Club to DIA's Gurumbai Trail at Rapid Creek. By coincidence, the group also witnessed a staff member from the nearby Mercure Resort releasing a Black-footed Tree Rat (an endangered native species). The group were impressed to see the Resort showing such an interest in preserving the wildlife of the reserve. Lesley will circulate an article in the club's newsletter about the visit.

Members discussed some recent aircraft noise experienced in the northern suburbs. Air Traffic Control advised this could be a result of two things: Firstly, some new procedures have been introduced to ensure visibility of aircraft while the new air traffic control tower is constructed, with more general aviation aircraft now tracking in a northerly direction. Secondly, helicopters have been undertaking night training circuits of late.

## **6. General business**

No matters raised.

### **Remaining 2020 meeting dates:**

- Thursday 5 November