



Concurrent Meeting on 29 July 2021  
**Darwin International Airport Community Consultation Group  
Planning Coordination Forum**

**Web Report**

held at

Ansett Room, Mercure Darwin Airport Resort, Darwin International Airport

**1. Welcome and apologies**

Chair Chris Bigg welcomed members to the meeting. The Summary Record and Meeting Report of the CCG meeting on 4 March 2021 had been previously settled by circulation.

It was the first time the Community Consultation Group (CCG) and Planning Coordination Forum (PCF) meetings were run concurrently, rather than as two separate meetings held over two days. Planning Coordination Forum members who hadn't previously attended the CCG were welcomed to the meeting. A closed PCF session was held at the end of this meeting for PCF members only, for additional matters PCF members wished to discuss.

**2. Darwin Airport**

**CEO**

Tony Edmondstone spoke to the recent bottlenecks experienced in the NT Health passenger processing at the airport due to short staffing. This has resulted in lengthy wait times for arriving passengers as well as a knock-on effect to flight turnarounds and departing passengers. As NT Health works through these staffing issues, DIA has directed airlines to hold arriving passengers on the aircraft as it is a safer and more comfortable air-conditioned environment.

DIA is working with the Commonwealth and NT governments to commence processing Commonwealth international repatriation flights through Darwin Airport from early August 2021. Significant building works have been undertaken in the terminal to achieve physical and atmospheric separation of domestic and repatriation flight passengers.

It was recently announced that Airport Development Group (DIA's parent company) has been the recipient of a \$30M Federal Government diesel fuel grant, to construct a new diesel storage facility in Darwin. ADG will be matching this grant dollar for dollar to build the new facility, planned for East Arm.

**Property & Terminal**

Ross Baynes provided an update on property and terminal developments:

- DIA is preparing a master plan to guide the development of the terminal and forecourt over the next decade.
- The refurbishment of the first six hotel villas marks the start of the transformation of the existing airport hotels into a distinct world class tropical resort. The remaining villas and rooms will be progressively renovated, and the overall amenity enhanced.

- Works are continuing to improve on the safety and realignment of Henry Wrigley Drive and Sir Norman Brearley Drive. Completion is expected in late 2021 (subject to weather). As part of these upgrades, the digital and static billboards previously located on Henry Wrigley Drive will be relocated to McMillans Road.

### **Aviation Development**

Allan Woo spoke of recent aviation matters:

- Since the last CCG and PCF meetings, airlines have been adding and reallocating more capacity to meet demand. In May 2021, DIA was at 90% of usual pre-COVID domestic traffic and anticipating 110% for the dry season. However, the subsequent NT and other state lockdowns resulted in a reduction to 75% of usual traffic for June.
- The recovery rate for Alice Springs Airport is not as high, with vulnerability to the international market.
- Direct services between Darwin and Canberra have commenced with Qantas.
- DIA is optimistic there may be commercial flights to some international ports by early 2022. DIA's priority is the recovery of key passenger and freight routes with key strategic partners.
- As a result of COVID, pallet and contained air cargo services are currently servicing Darwin that would not have previously flown here. There is an opportunity for DIA to capture these services in the longer term.

### **Environment**

Nick Fewster outlined a number of environmental initiatives at Darwin Airport:

- Planning is underway for new environmentally sensitive nature-based event areas within the Rapid Creek Conservation Reserve. These event areas will support cultural activities and events for hotel guests and the broader community, and gives the airport the opportunity to raise the profile of the conservation reserve as an environmental and cultural asset.
- DIA worked with stakeholders including community birdwatchers and NT Government agencies to successfully trap and eradicate a Myna bird seen at DIA over the past few months. The Myna bird is a known threat to biodiversity and had previously been unrecorded in Darwin.
- The Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) program for wildlife hazard management at Darwin Airport has now completed its first full year. Results for the 100ha treated site surrounding the main runway show: 75% less insects post treatment; 11% reduction in broadleaf weeds; 10% increase in desirable grasses.

### **Indigenous & community projects**

Airport Development Group (ADG) is the parent company of DIA. Rychelle Vines presented on ADG's indigenous and community projects, including:

- ADG has a focus on indigenous education and employment pathways, and is working to establish an indigenous training academy.
- The hotel redevelopment will showcase the diversity of indigenous culture and places across the Territory. A key focal point will be a new artwork to the existing 41m high water tower and a welcome to country. Each of the refurbished villas is being named after a significant indigenous Territorian.
- ADG has sponsored the indigenous cricket arm of NT Cricket's 365 program. The program provides a pathway for indigenous kids to develop skills and a love of cricket through sports clinics and gala days.

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

Callan Langlands reported that the recent COVID hotspots have taken up a lot of focus within the Department, with the Australian Government recognising that the domestic aviation sector is still in recovery from the impact of the pandemic. To date, the Government has committed \$4.5 billion to support the aviation industry through this unprecedented crisis, and to assist economic recovery post COVID-19.

As part of the 2021-22 Federal Budget, the Government has committed \$130.5 million over three years to conduct investigations at 37 Australian civil airports to determine the current extent of PFAS contamination on airport land.

Longer term, the Government's focus is on looking for opportunities for reform to ensure the aviation sector is on a sustainable footing once travel bans and border restrictions are lifted. The Government has sought input from the aviation sector and the public to inform a five-year plan to strengthen and grow the aviation sector beyond COVID-19. The plan is expected to be released in 2021.

National Airports Safeguarding Advisory Group (NASAG) last met on 13 July 2021. The group discussed draft recommendations for the NASF Implementation Review report. The next meeting will be held in November 2021.

### **4. Department of Defence**

#### **RAAF Base Darwin operational update**

FLTLT Jonathon Schoenmaker advised:

- Exercise Arnhem Thunder and Exercise Rogue Ambush were successfully completed earlier this year.
- A fast jet exercise with the Singapore Air Force is scheduled for mid-September.
- RAAF Base Darwin has assisted with some 60 Commonwealth international repatriation flights to date.
- A noise monitoring exercise will be undertaken for the Darwin aerodrome to better understand the noise profiles of fast jet aircraft, and identify strategies to mitigate noise for the community.

#### **RAAF Base Darwin ATC update**

SQNLDR Martin Ferguson reflected that there has been a lot of military aircraft during the exercise periods in Darwin this year. There has been a significant reduction in civil aircraft traffic due to the recent COVID lockdowns in the NT and interstate, which aligns with the passenger data shared by Allan Woo earlier in the meeting.

The construction of the new ATC tower upgrade project is nearing completion and returning to normal procedures. The internal fitout is almost complete.

#### **RAAF Base Darwin projects update**

In reference to ADG's indigenous and community projects, SQNLDR Craig Sedgman spoke of the Air Force Cadets program in Darwin and raised the potential opportunity for engagement with ADG. Bob Calaby suggested there might be an opportunity for the cadets to be involved with DIA's next aerodrome exercise.

Defence continues to work closely with DIA on the aircraft arrestor refurbishment program, with the western end of the runway almost complete and the eastern end to commence soon. The P8 hangar is expected to be completed in early 2022, followed by the concrete paving in late 2022. Accommodation on base is being updated in preparation for Pitch Black 2022.

SQNLDR Sedgman highlighted the base security upgrade to be undertaken for the new F35A aircraft, which may have implications for DIA airfield staff. DIA requested RAAF provide a briefing when appropriate.

### **Defence Support Report**

John Cox advised a mid-term refresh for the base is being prepared. From an environmental perspective, the previous wet season impeded on some weed control on the base which is now being targeted. Defence and DIA continue to work well together on gamba grass management. Similarly the joint Defence/DIA wildlife monitoring and tracking continues.

### **Estate Planning**

Tim Hogan reiterated Estate Planning's role in liaising with the NT Government on proposed planning developments and planning matters, including involvement in the recent reviews of the NT Planning Scheme. Estate Planning is also a member of NASAG. In recent months, Estate Planning has responded to a number of development applications for Berrimah Business Park.

## **5. NT Government – Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics**

### **Lands Planning**

Doug Lesh outlined the work DIPL has been progressing on National Airports Safeguarding Framework (NASF) Guideline F (airspace protection). The DIPL website is being updated with more concise information (with input and links provided by Defence and DIA) and a letter is being prepared to be sent to building certifiers to remind them of their obligations under the Federal airport related legislation to ensure building height controls are adhered to.

Stage 1 engagement of the Palmerston Environs Subregional Land Use Plan has been completed. A draft Land Use Plan is expected to be released later this year for consultation. Doug clarified that this piece of work looks at the broad urban catchments and is not related to council boundaries.

Bob Calaby complimented DIPL on the improvements made to Development Assessment Services. The process is much more streamlined and Bob has been receiving regular feedback on applications.

### **Transport Infrastructure Planning**

Chandan Kalase advised he is working closely with Doug Lesh on the Palmerston Environs Subregional Land Use Plan. Options are currently being prepared for the Bagot Road Shared Path Study which will be shared with the community later this year.

## **6. City of Darwin**

Alice Percy outlined a range of council initiatives:

- City of Darwin has recently published its first Greening Strategy and Climate Strategy. The City of Darwin Movement Strategy ties in closely to these.

- City of Darwin's Reconciliation Action Plan has recently been launched.
- A Tourism Plan is being developed that will highlight 49 experiences around the Darwin region.
- Council is investigating options of a tourism master plan between the CBD and East Point, and tying it into the Darwin City Deal.
- City of Darwin and City of Denpasar have signed a letter of intent to become sister cities.

## **7. Tourism Top End**

Glen Hingley gave a short presentation on tourism and learnings from the recent COVID lockdowns that have had a major impact on tourism in the Top End, equating to \$7.6M in 2019 terms. Tourism Top End is working closely with the tourism industry and creating a positive campaign in the community that vaccination is the path forward for recovery of the tourism industry. The NT Sentiment Survey from April-June 2021 indicated that 80% of tourism businesses were impacted by the NT's lockdown in June this year. Travel sentiment and confidence has been down sharply and is now slowly improving. Tourism Top End is working closely with Tourism NT to dial up and down activities based on hotspots in order to increase demand.

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

Dawn Lawrie summarised a number of items for consideration that have previously been raised:

- Consideration of a Halal food offering in the terminal's food and beverage outlets.
- Accessibility of the shuttle bus for reduced mobility passengers
- Easier access to the airport car parks (range of movement difficulties in reaching the ticket at the boom gate)

Addendum – Correspondence received from Dawn Lawrie post-meeting 29 July 2021:

*"As a Community Member of the DIA Community Consultation group I would like to express both my support and my appreciation of the DIA staff for the way in which they are coping with the current problems due to ever changing restrictions of movement within Australia. It is not easy dealing with distressed people and an extra layer of understanding has been required – and judging from comments of friends who have been travelling "home" airport staff have done their best."*

## **9. Lunch Break – Tour of refurbished hotel villas**

During the lunch break between the CCG and PCF meetings, members were taken on a short tour of the newly refurbished hotel villas.



*Refurbished hotel villa with private plunge pool*

Remaining 2021 meeting dates: Thursday 4 November.