



Concurrent Meeting on 6 July 2023  
**Darwin International Airport Community Consultation Group  
& Planning Coordination Forum**

**Web Report**

held at Bonaparte Room, Novotel Darwin Airport & Microsoft Teams

**1. Welcome and apologies**

Chair Chris Bigg welcomed members to the meeting, and apologies were noted. The Summary Record and Meeting Report of the CCG meeting on 23 February 2023 had been previously settled by circulation.

**2. Darwin Airport / Airport Development Group**

**ADG overview**

Tony Edmondstone summarised a number of projects at the airport:

- The Method of Works Plan for the upcoming resurfacing of the main runway is being finalised by Defence (discussed in more detail at Item 4 of this Summary Record). Once complete it will provide airlines with certainty for their operating schedules. As explained at the last meeting, resurfacing of the runway is a necessary maintenance requirement. The works need to be undertaken during the dry season, and the smaller cross runway isn't capable of accommodating all the aircraft traffic while the resurfacing occurs.
- The hotel/resort redevelopment is a couple of months behind schedule, expected to be significantly complete by Q3 2023.
- Inside the terminal, two-thirds of the new auto bag drop units for the check-in area have been installed and are operational. These will significantly reduce front of house congestion. New food and beverage offerings are being developed, as are plans to consolidate all security screening operations to the east of the check-in area. These works are expected to be largely complete by next dry season.
- There were recent power outages across the precinct due to ageing infrastructure (that is currently part of a replacement program). ADG is also investigating battery storage solutions.

**Aviation development**

Allan Woo shared the following insights:

- By late FY23 passenger volumes recovered to about 10-15% below pre-COVID figures. This figure has stagnated due to economic factors and airline capacity constraints (both crew and aircraft).
- The outlook for FY24 will be driven by the forward planning of the airlines, with estimates that passenger numbers will continue to be less than pre-COVID figures.
- The upcoming runway resurfacing works are expected to constrain airline capacity recovery and growth. The airlines will make decisions about their operations in

relation to two constraints while the works are underway: a shorter runway, and periods of runway closure. Some airlines have been selling less seats, however Jetstar recently chose to temporarily halt flights between Darwin and Bali from October to November 2023 due to uncertainty around the upcoming runway works.

- Over the past 12 months Qantas has cut some services to/from Darwin, with flights to Canberra and Cairns becoming seasonal services instead. Similarly, Virgin Australia has reduced flights between Darwin and Adelaide (now also a seasonal service) and suspended all flights between Darwin and Sydney.
- In late July, Nexus Airlines will commence services between Darwin and the Kimberley.

### **Property & terminal**

Adrian Massey gave an update on terminal and ground transport developments:

- The shade structures for the car parks have been ordered, and a car park reconfiguration exercise is in progress to improve efficiencies.
- Landscaping works to the forecourt area in front of the terminal are expected to commence shortly.
- The expansion and renovation of the domestic departure lounge continues, with new food and beverage offerings being constructed. Darwin Airport continues to proactively manage the construction schedule to limit disruptions to passengers and tenants. Regular updates are shared on social media and the airport's website.

### **Operations**

Rob Porter spoke about a range of operational and project matters:

- There is a lot of activity with some 120 projects underway across Darwin Airport. Most of these are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2024.
- Darwin Airport was one of the first Australian airports to introduce the new industry standard screening technology a few years ago. We have now become a leader in security compliance, with other airports learning from us.
- Once complete, the new auto bag drop equipment will significantly improve the time it takes to check-in at Darwin Airport. Passengers using the new self-service kiosks and auto bag drops will be supported by airline representatives.
- The next Aerodrome Emergency Exercise is scheduled for 16 August 2023.
- The high voltage cable replacement program continues, with more than 5km of new cable already installed.
- The Bay 3 aerobridge installation is now complete, and the Bay 1 link bridge is next in the planning works.

Chris Bigg raised a number of accessibility queries on behalf of Dawn Lawrie. Rob Porter provided the following feedback to Dawn's queries:

- There have been no recent complaints from people regarding disability access to the terminal. Accessibility is front of mind for the improvements that are being planned for the terminal forecourt area, which includes access to the terminal and hire cars.
- Airline staff are on hand to support customers checking-in using the new self-service kiosks and auto bag drop units.

- Darwin Airport has recently been working with our airline partners to provide powered wheelchair access to aircraft.
- Darwin Airport is working with government to support hidden disabilities to ensure inclusivity for all passengers passing through the airport.

### **Wildlife hazard management**

Mike Clancy presented on the airport's wildlife hazard management plan, jointly prepared by Darwin Airport / RAAF Base Darwin. Historically, the aerodrome has had one of the highest bird strike rates in Australia. From 2006-2015 there was an average of 11.15 strikes per 10,000 movements. Rather than relying on the same reactive strategies, DIA/RAAF adopted an unconventional and innovative approach, using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM). The grass around the main runway is sprayed with a broad spectrum insect control to reduce the food sources for insect feeders. Since the introduction of IVM in 2018-19, wildlife strikes have reduced and now average 5.3 strikes per 10,000 movements. In FY24 the IVM program will be further improved to include grass growth suppression and seedhead control.

### **Darwin Airport 2023 Master Plan**

Victoria Moore provided an update on the preparation of the Darwin Airport 2023 Master Plan. The Master Plan was scheduled to be released for public comment in mid-2023. The joint civil-military aircraft noise forecasts have taken longer for Defence to finalise than was originally anticipated, so Darwin Airport sought a 6-month extension to the delivery of the Master Plan. The Minister granted the airport's request, with the Master Plan now due to be submitted by 6 March 2024 (rather than 6 September 2023). Darwin Airport anticipates the Master Plan will be released for public comment later this year.

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

Tracey Wilkinson spoke about a range of departmental matters including:

- Consultation on the Terms of Reference for the Aviation White Paper was undertaken in early 2023. The outcomes from this consultation is informing the development of the Green Paper, anticipated to be released for public consultation shortly. More information can be found at: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/aviation/aviation-white-paper>
- The Australian Jet Zero Council has been established to work with the aviation industry to identify opportunities to decarbonise the sector, and opportunities for industry and government to collaborate in achieving emissions reduction targets, including through sustainable aviation fuels and emerging technology. More information can be found at: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/aviation>
- All feedback received in relation to sunseting regulation instruments has, and will continue to be, shared with the Aviation White Paper team. Minor, mechanical and technical amendments to the regulations will be considered and progressed through the sunseting process. Framework-wide reforms and reforms requiring amendments to the Airports Act will be considered through the Aviation White Paper process.
- The Aviation White Paper will also be informed by feedback and experiences of Aviation Access Forum members.
- NASAG last met on 19 April 2023. The next meeting is anticipated to occur in September/October 2023. The NASAG Forward Work Plan includes reviews of

Guideline B (windshear), Guideline C (wildlife hazard management) and Guideline D (windfarms). The review of Guideline C is currently underway.

- The PFAS Investigation Program committed to by the Australian Government has completed its pilot program of eight airports. The purpose of the program is to provide whole-of-site PFAS investigations that are independently audited, and to develop robust and nationally consistent management plans to ensure any contamination is addressed. The department is currently engaging with airports to join the next round of the program. The program is expected to be completed by 30 June 2027.
- The department is progressing broad drone security policy initiatives for improved safety and security outcomes around airports and aerodromes, and in the community.

#### **4. Runway works update**

Air Commodore Ron Tilley gave a briefing of the proposed staging for the main runway resurfacing works:

- The Method of Works Plan for the project is expected to be finalised in the coming weeks. The plan ensures safety, satisfies regulations, supports communication and minimises disruption. It will be published two weeks prior to works commencing so airlines can prepare their flying schedules.
- Works are scheduled to commence on 10 August 2023, and the resurfacing will work from East to West. It isn't possible to complete the entire resurfacing in the 2023 dry season, so the works will be split over the 2023 and 2024 dry seasons to ensure disruption is minimised for both civil and military aircraft operations.
- From 9 October – 30 November 2023 the works are expected to cause disruption as the runway length will be reduced to approximately 2100m and the runway will also be temporarily closed between 2am – 11.30am. The temporary closure during these hours allows for the central section of the runway to be worked on, while being the least disruptive to airline schedules. Emergency services will continue to operate throughout.
- Runway resurfacing works will end on 30 November this year for the wet season. Works are anticipated to resume in April 2024 (after Easter) and the resurfacing is expected to be completed by November 2024.
- The timing of the 2024 works will be firmed up later this year. The work schedule will focus to reduce impacts in the peak tourist dry season and during Exercise Pitch Black.

#### **5. Department of Defence / RAAF Base Darwin**

##### **RAAF Base Darwin operations and projects**

Squadron Leader Jay Murray shared the following update:

- RAAF Base Darwin continues to support a lot of transit aircraft as well as the scheduled military exercises.
- There are less military fast jets expected at RAAF Base Darwin this year due to the runway resurfacing works. The number of fast jets is expected to increase next year for Exercise Pitch Black 2024.

- Exercise Mobility Guardian begins in mid-July 2023, with predominantly large aircraft.
- Exercise Talisman Sabre will be the largest military exercise held at RAAF Base Darwin this year with 22 aircraft.

### **RAAF Base Darwin Air Traffic Control**

Squadron Leader James Lee advised that Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) procedures remain in place between 2200 – 0600. Air traffic control is also working closely with the runway resurfacing works team.

### **Defence Support**

Nola Chellingworth explained there are a number of significant projects underway at RAAF Base Darwin:

- The mid-term refresh is in the late design phase.
- Additional apron space for the US Force Posture Initiatives is in the design phase.
- The internal road network and some accommodation on base is to be upgraded.

Defence has recently signed a 5-year lease with the NT Government for the Centre for National Resilience Howard Springs, which will now be known as Defence Accommodation Precinct Darwin. The facility will host both Australian Defence Force and international forces personnel, taking pressure off the limited on-base Defence accommodation in Darwin as well as local hotel accommodation, particularly during the dry season.

### **Defence Estate Planning**

Tim Hogan advised that the Estate Planning team continues to respond to relevant development applications surrounding the aerodrome. Tim reiterated that Defence has revised the joint civil-military ANEF contours (that will form part of the next Darwin Airport 2023 Master Plan) to capture feedback received from the NT Government during consultation. Defence is currently finalising its public safety areas project.

## **6. Airservices Australia**

John Graham shared that there had been 2 individual noise complainants for the period February–June 2023. One was from a Rapid Creek resident who was disturbed by late night / early morning departures. The other was a non-noise related issue raised by an employee of Darwin International Airport about an issue in the airport terminal.

## **7. NT Government – Lands Planning**

Following on from the Defence Estate Planning update, Matthew Simpson explained that the preparation of the new joint civil-military ANEF is the first time the contours have expanded into new residential areas. The department is looking at how these new ANEF contours will affect future growth areas.

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

Grahame Webb spoke of his observations between the airport's passenger data and visitation to his tourism business, with his figures showing the same number of interstate visitors as last year whereas the airport's figures showed decline. Grahame suggested that if this indicates air visitation is down, perhaps self-drive visitation is up.

Tony Edmondstone commented that we are currently experiencing high airfares to Darwin and less capacity (available seats). There doesn't appear to be a correlation between the number of passengers passing through the airport and hotel occupancy. Passenger figures are currently higher than the occupancy of the airport's hotel/resort, suggesting that a higher proportion of passengers are visiting/staying with friends and relatives. This means that the tourism spend rate will likely be reduced.

Tony went on to explain that the Aviation White Paper will be critical for Airport Development Group's airports of Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek as the Northern Territory's population is heavily reliant on air connectivity, and our requirements are very different to the east coast airports of Australia.

Remaining 2023 meeting dates: Thursday 2 November.