

Report on the online questionnaire

Inquiry into the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Repeal Bill 2020

As part of its inquiry into the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Repeal Bill 2020, Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment launched an online questionnaire to encourage public participation in an efficient and accessible way. This was the primary means by which community members were encouraged to share their views on the bill.

The questionnaire was not intended as a statistically valid, random survey. Respondents self-selected in choosing to participate. This means that respondents were not a representative sample of the NSW population, but rather interested members of the public who volunteered their time to have a say. It should be noted that a small number of the participants in the questionnaire resided outside of New South Wales.

The online questionnaire was open from 16 October 2020 to 23 October 2020. The committee received responses from 442 individual participants. The majority of participants were from the Central Coast region (71.04 per cent). 33.44 per cent of these participants listed 2259 as their postcode which includes Warnervale and the surrounding suburbs.

This report summarises the responses expressed by participants and provides a sample of views on the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Repeal Bill 2020. These responses will inform the committee's views throughout the inquiry and may be used in the inquiry report.

Questions asked

The questionnaire comprised of three main questions, including a question on the respondent's position on the bill and two open ended questions regarding:

- the reasons for their position on the bill
- any other comments to explain their views on the bill.

The questions are reproduced at Appendix 1.

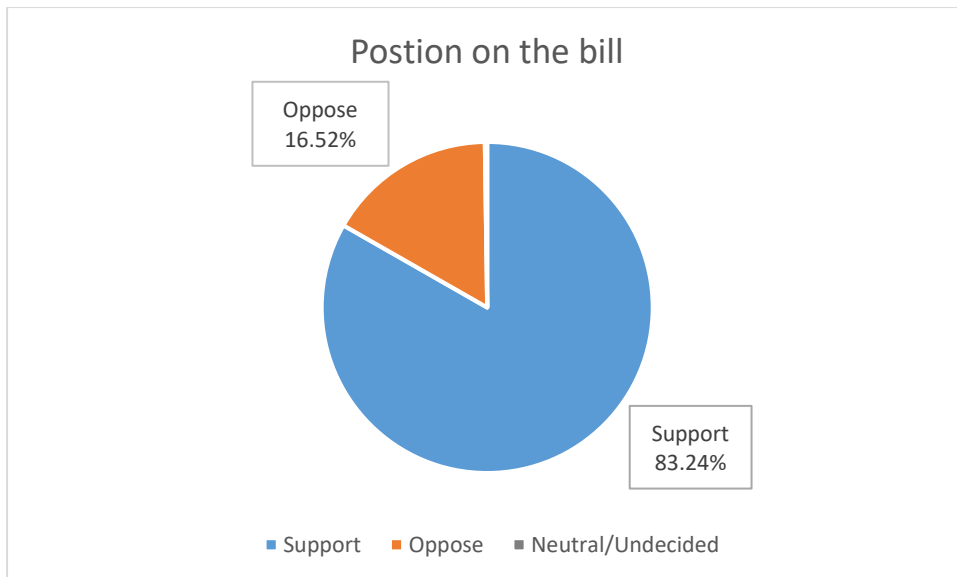
Responses to questions

Question 2: What is your position on the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Repeal Bill 2020?

Question 2 was presented in a multiple choice format and participants were able to choose from the following options: 'Support', 'Neutral/Undecided' or 'Oppose'.

- The vast majority of participants (368 respondents, or 83.26 per cent) supported the bill. If passed, the bill would immediately remove the daily take off and landing cap for Warnervale Airport and, at a future date, repeal the *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act 1996*.
- 73 participants (16.52 per cent) indicated their opposition to the bill in answer to Question 2.
- 1 participant (0.23 per cent) indicated their neutrality or chose not to answer this question.

Samples of the individual comments made to support these views are outlined below.



Question 3: In relation to the previous question, please explain your position on the bill.

Support for the bill

The majority of participants that expressed support for the bill indicated that the repeal of the *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act 1996* would lead to increased employment opportunities and economic prosperity for the region. These benefits include the creation of a workforce of skilled professionals, the development of a small regional general aviation hub that would support emergency services and increased tourism:

- 'Build it, expand it and see the growth in jobs in the region and not just labouring jobs but technical and professional jobs.'
- 'This business employs many people in the community - with highly specialised skill sets and no other facility like this in the area... Apart from being a place for hobbyists, this airport provides training for our residents and is a vital area for emergency services to use in their work.'
- 'The existing Airport facility is a critical piece of infrastructure which has the capacity to create specialised employment in the post COVID era. The Sydney basin in particular Bankstown Airport is over developed forcing smaller operators out of the Sydney basin. This poses a wonderful opportunity to the central coast to develop an accessible hub for general aviation. This would ensure the facility is economically viable and not a drain on the resources of state & local governments.'
- 'Warnervale airfield provides a valuable range of services that should be preserved, and could be further extended (without imposition on local residents) to increase employment, attract investment and become a thriving hub for general aviation and its related businesses. Development of the Western Sydney airport will place pressure on airfields such as Bankstown and Camden - attracting this cashflow to the Central Coast will be positive for everyone who lives there.'
- 'The airfield has huge potential for growth into a small regional general aviation hub (without any increase in length) that has the potential to provide high tech employment for the young people of the Coast. The airfield is an important part of the social structure of the region in the same way as water sports, playing fields and other social infrastructure facilities.'
- 'The unrestricted operation of the airport is an important element of the economic growth of the Central Coast region. Not only does it offer additional attraction for tourism to the region it also provides a base for safety services to operate from (e.g. air ambulance - with the M1 so close, fire services, etc). It's important to note that during the COVID lockdown in May, Central Coast Council highlighted the importance of the airport as an essential service for the region (flyer included with resident rates notices). As such it should be allowed to operate safely, without restriction.'

- 'Providing some certainty around the future of the airport means the highly respected training operations for young people can be expanded, tourism attraction can be increased, helping to grow our local economy and community.'

Many participants also expressed that the Warnervale Airport was a critical piece of Central Coast infrastructure that provides important benefits to the region. They argued that the repeal of the bill is necessary to ensure these services can continue unimpeded:

- 'Warnervale Airport provides a vital asset to the Central Coast. It provides an operational airport for emergency operations in time of Fire, and Medical Emergencies. It provides a base of operation for the Flying Schools, vital for training future airline pilots. It provides a base of operation for Recreational Flying for the wider community.'
- 'Warnervale Airport is an essential piece of infrastructure required to facilitate general aviation. We have already lost a number of airports in the Sydney/Newcastle area and when the new Sydney airport is built, operations at Bankstown could be constrained. We will need Warnervale to provide one of the few remaining airports to provide the facilities necessary to train pilots of the future.'
- 'It's the only place aircraft can land between Sydney and Newcastle for either private purposes, training purposes or emergency services such as water-bombing in the fire season.'

Several participants likewise noted that the *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act 1996* was put in place to protect the community from large aircraft however the surrounding terrain prevents Warnervale Airport from expanding to support this type of operation:

- 'The critical issue for the jet operations (so prominent in the lead up to the Act) is runway dimension, particularly runway length. A medium range jet, such as a 737, requires a runway of 2256 metres. A long-range jet, such as 747, requires 3292 metres. Thus, the runway would need to almost double, or almost triple, its current length for these respective aircraft. The runway will never be lengthened past its current 1196 metres due to physical barriers making it impossible.'
- 'The runway is narrow, the taxiways are rough and ready - this airfield could never sustain jet traffic, nor should it.'
- 'The Act was enacted to protect the community from large jet transport operations. The runway has never been sufficiently long enough for any jet transport aircraft operating in Australia. The airport is surrounded by terrain which makes it very difficult to physically lengthen the runway (wetlands immediately South, a major road and rising terrain to the North). Environmental zoning surrounding the Airport requires that State Government must consent to any lengthening of the runway. There is no economic case for jet airline or freight operations at Warnervale, as Warnervale is within a 2 hour radius of Sydney, Newcastle and soon, Western Sydney Airport, all of which cater to these operations.'
- 'Appropriate planning protections are already included which make destruction of the surrounding conservation lands very difficult. ... The Airport and the Wetlands have existed symbiotically for over 47 years, and limited, sensible development of the Airport site will continue this tradition.'

Furthermore, a number of participants asserted that the *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act 1996* is unnecessary and should be repealed. They noted that Warnervale Airport is no different from many other airports throughout the state which operate without the need for such an Act:

- 'The circumstances which currently apply to this aerodrome are no different to hundreds of others throughout NSW and other States and territories. That being the case, there is no case whatsoever for retaining it on this ground. The Act is no longer necessary.'
- 'The Act is unique; no other airport of this type in Australia is constrained by such a limiting piece of legislation. This fact alone requires that Warnervale Airport have an exceptional case for requiring such a unique Act. Warnervale is no different than hundreds of other similar airfields, none of which require a unique Act. This Act is an outlier, and there is simply no logical case for its retention.'

- 'The *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act, 1996* (Act) is unique – it is the only piece of legislation like it, imposed on any airport, anywhere in Australia. It is unnecessary and restricts the only piece of aviation infrastructure on the Central Coast. The circumstances which lead to the Act now no longer exist.'
- 'No other small (council-owned) airport has such a restriction'

Opposition to the bill

For participants who opposed the bill, a common view was that the removal of the flight cap would lead to an increase in noise generated by the aircraft utilising the Airport. In particular they were concerned with the potential disruption to their quality of life:

- 'It is negligent to impose additional noise burden on a large and growing community to satisfy a very small number of hobby pilots.'
- 'We moved here from Sydney for a sea change. We don't want it to be like under the Bankstown flight path, a plane every 2 minutes, we want to hear birds and nature, not planes.'
- 'The noise from low flying planes around the residential Tuggerah lakes area is disturbing especially at night and during day. Joy flights and training aerobatics is not what residents who live locally were informed about or agreed on when purchasing homes here. We have been subjected to small planes circling the lakes practising their noisy turns and dives up to midnight and in morning hours. It's like having a constant lawnmower noise in the sky and reminds us of the noisy seaplanes flying low over Pittwater.'
- 'My property borders the runway. More planes and increased hours will be disruptive to our life and community. There are restrictions already in place for this reason.'

Some participants pointed to the continued financial burden that Warnervale Airport poses to the Central Coast Council as a reason for their opposition to the bill:

- 'So far it runs at a loss of \$500,000 per year to the council which can't even pay its staff as it has a \$89 million dollar deficit! Where will they have the money to contribute, and then improve the roads and other infrastructure around the increased airport?'
- 'The Central Coast Council is in severe financial distress caused by a dud amalgamation and cannot afford further costs and losses with this white elephant.'
- 'I sincerely doubt that an expansion of the movements to and from this airfield will enable a profit, but it will negatively impact the lives of the ever increasing population in the area.'

In addition there were numerous mentions of concerns that increased activity or expansion to the operations at Warnervale Airport would have negative impacts on the surrounding environment:

- 'The restrictions are needed to stop any extension to the airport which already runs into the adjacent ecologically significant Porters Creek Wetland. This wetland is the largest existing wetland on the Central Coast and apart from being a habitat for important flora and fauna, filters floodwaters that enter the Wyong River and eventually the Tuggerah Lake. It needs to be protected.'
- 'This area cannot support an expansion of the current airport. The land surrounding is environmentally sensitive wetlands which cannot be built on. The airport is now also surrounded by industry and housing and schools.'

A few participants suggested that rather than repealing the *Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act 1996* completely, amendments to the current bill would work effectively in meeting the needs and concerns of local residents:

- 'Why can't the Bill be amended to lift the flight restrictions only? Make sure whatever happens that it doesn't impinge on the quality of life for nearby residents or adversely affect any of the environmental constraints.'

- 'I question why it was desirable to bring a Repeal Bill when it may have been more practical to amend the existing Act, assuming that some updating and improvement to the Act was indeed required.'

Question 4: Do you have any other comments on the bill?

In response to this question, participants generally reiterated their position on the bill:

- 'Repealing of the bill will enable Warnervale airport to contribute to the local economy, provide high skilled jobs, provide increased revenue to council which is sorely needed. The airport is the only airport to which the restrictions under the WAR Act have been applied. It is out of date for current and future environment.'
- 'We believe the government should pass the bill and focus on growing this airport as it'll bring major business development to the area.'
- 'Light aircraft is a growing form of both travel and business use and as such the airport is a necessary part of the infrastructure of the Central Coast.'
- 'The Central Coast needs an airport. An airport that will support local jobs and allow for emergency services to have access to the tenth largest region (by population) in Australia.'
- 'The previous Central Coast Council's own Airport Master Plan of 2017 attracted 137 expression of interest (EOI's) & 17 Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) these are real businesses that wanted to relocate to the Central Coasts airport. Enormous interest & potential that was rejected by our current councillors without putting the master plan out to public comment. Those businesses could be operating right now on the Central Coast'.
- 'The bill is redundant and irrelevant because the airport (due to CASA Regulations Manual of Standards Pt 139) could never and will never be used in the way the WAR Act was intended to prohibit.'
- 'The time has long passed for its repeal. It is the only Act of its kind in Australia. No other airfield anywhere in Australia has such an Act. It is entirely inappropriate for this Act to remain in place.'
- 'The residents are entitled to the protection of the Act as this could potentially have a huge impact on their largest asset - their home.'
- 'Please don't repeal the Act, they're planning on pouring millions of ratepayer dollars we don't have into it ... our Council is insolvent and ratepayers are tired of losing more than \$500,000 a year to allow people to hobby fly. There is another airport at Belmont, approx 30 km away that caters to their needs.'
- 'The requests to council by the users of the airport to expand it is not an option as it would impinge on the already shrinking porters Creek wetland, an integral flood management ecosystem for the Wyong river catchment as well of environmental importance for wildlife and birdlife. I suggest a relocation of the asset be included in the development plan of the CC council area.'

Conclusion

The online questionnaire has been a valuable tool to efficiently gather the views of interested individuals on the issues raised in terms of reference. The information gathered will inform the committee's views as the inquiry progresses and be reflected in the inquiry report. The committee may also use the responses to support its findings and conclusions.

Appendix 1: List of questions asked

Questions:

1. Please enter your contact details.

Name:

Email address:

Postcode:

2. What is your position on the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Repeal Bill 2020?
Multiple choice

a. Support

b. Neutral/ Undecided

c. Oppose

3. In relation to the previous question, please explain your position on the bill.
500 words – free text box

4. Do you have any other comments on the bill?
250 words – free text box