

# AIRSERVICES ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR CHANGES TO AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS (EXCLUDING ON-GROUND WORKS)

Airservices Australia's environmental obligations are derived from both the Air Services Act 1995 and Commonwealth environmental legislation.

The Air Services Act states that Airservices must give regard to the safety of air navigation as its most important consideration. Subject to this, Airservices must perform its functions so that as far as practicable, the environment is protected from the effects associated with the operation and use of aircraft.

Airservices obligations under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 require it to obtain and consider advice from the Commonwealth Environment Minister before authorising the 'adoption or implementation of a plan for aviation airspace management involving aircraft operations that are likely to have a significant impact on the environment'.

This factsheet explains the environmental assessment process that Airservices (and consultants working for Airservices) must apply to meet its environmental obligations for aircraft operations.

## **National Operating Standard**

Airservices operates under a standard process, known as a National Operating Standard (NOS), to undertake all environmental assessments, including those relating to

proposed changes to aircraft operations. The NOS applies to all proposed changes to Airservices air traffic management practices, such as:

- a new, or amendment to an existing, instrument approach
- a new, or amendment to an existing, flight path or air route
- a change to preferred runways
- a change in time of day of operations (such as amendments to tower hours of operation – the time of day that a tower operates may alter the flight path used by aircraft).

Neither a decision of an air traffic controller to alter the track of an individual aircraft nor a change in level of use of a flight path constitutes proposals requiring assessment.

The NOS ensures Airservices meets its legislative obligations and helps it identify issues for mitigation and engagement strategies wherever appropriate. In addition, the NOS aligns with the requirements of the Environmental Management Standard (ISO 14001) under which Airservices is certified. The standardised process is set out below.



## Initial change screening

An initial screening of a proposal is undertaken early in the planning phase to assess potential environmental risks against criteria relating primarily to aircraft flight patterns (including location, altitude and communities flown over).

If the risk screening finds that under any of the criteria there is a potential risk of increased impact, then further environmental assessment is required, as detailed below.

## Environmental assessment planning

Airservices considers the level of environmental risk arising from the proposed change, and then designs the detailed assessment methodology.

Where Airservices considers the risks to be so great that they could not be mitigated, the proposal will be removed from the assessment process and sent back to the proponent for rescopeing.

## Environmental assessment

This comprises a detailed assessment of risks in the following key areas:

- community noise
- aircraft emissions
- other environmental impacts. This is defined by the EPBC Act as:
  - a. ecosystems and their constituent parts including people and communities
  - b. natural and physical resources
  - c. qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas
  - d. heritage values of places; and
  - e. the social, economic and cultural aspects of a thing mentioned in paragraphs a, b or c.

This assessment stage determines whether the change has the potential to cause significant impact to the environment and is undertaken against a suite of metrics (which have been informed by best practice in other noise-generating industries), including:

- number of noise events above 60dB(A) and 70dB(A)
- maximum noise levels
- average noise levels
- estimates of population levels potentially affected by changes in noise levels.

Where Airservices determines that the proposal is unlikely to result in significant impact on the environment, then the proposed change may continue as planned.

In accordance with Section 160 of the EPBC Act, where Airservices determines that the proposal may have a potential significant impact on the environment, the Environment Minister must be informed of the proposal and will then provide advice as to whether formal assessment under the Act is required or if the proposal can proceed as planned (subject to a range of conditions).

## Community and stakeholder plan

For proposed changes that could have a negative impact on a community, Airservices will use the information provided by the environmental assessment to develop a plan for engagement with the community and stakeholders. This plan will inform engagement and consultation with the community in line with Airservices published Communication and Consultation protocol. The plan can be updated at any time throughout the process as new information becomes available through further environmental analysis or community feedback.

## Further environmental analysis

At any stage, further analysis into specific issues can be undertaken. This may support community or industry engagement or to refine the design of the procedure.

## Post implementation review

A post implementation review (PIR) is undertaken for implemented changes. This examines whether predicted and actual outcomes align and will also analyse community responses and/ or complaints. The PIR can recommend redesign to achieve improvements, noting that any such changes would require further environmental assessment.

## Useful documents

Air Services Act 1995 - <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/C2004A04931>

Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 - <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/C2004A00485>

About the EPBC Act - <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/about/index.html>

Airservices Communication and Consultation Protocol - <http://www.airservicesaustralia.com/publications/corporate-publications/communication-and-consultation-protocol/>

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