

HELICOPTER NOISE REPORT FOR MSYRG

Introduction

A quick Google search of helicopter noise reveals that:

- It is of concern in many countries. There are major reports from US (1) and UK (2)
- There is recognition of need for research to make helicopters less noisy.
- Germany possibly most advanced in this area (3)
- No good social studies on the impact of helicopter noise that I could find. Extensive scientific information on the psycho-acoustic impact of wind turbines in US, but not helicopters.
- Helicopter noise may not be as loud as fixed wing but it is more annoying – described as “carpet beater”. There is heightened community reaction to helicopter noise.
- Voluntary agreements between communities and helicopter pilots are the generally recommended solution but there is no evidence that they work. There is evidence that they don’t work. For example (4)

In Australia noise complaints are dealt with by Airservices Australia. The Environmental Protection Agency has no role.

Airservices Australia

“Our vision is about working with industry to meet the challenges of a predicted 60 % growth in all traffic over the next 20 years. The level of growth means increased congestion at airports, and a range of other environmental and service efficiency issues. Airservices has a unique role at the heart of the aviation industry as we are well placed to bring the various players together.”

“Airservices works closely with the independent office of the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman (ANO) to improve the way in which we respond to community concern about the impact of air traffic on communities. The ANO’s website is www.ano.gov.au.” (5)

Handling of Complaints – see attachment Complaints management (5).

Noise and Information Complaints Service (NICS)
Aircraft Noise Ombudsman
Commonwealth Noise Ombudsman

I spoke to Chris Jameson at the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) on several occasions. He told me the helicopter industry is self regulated. The CASA position is that it would be virtually impossible to have a noise impact case heard without evidence of extensive community support.

There was no understanding of the neurology of noise – the fact that noise has both a sensory and affective component. In other words, there is the intensity of noise (how loud something is) and how much it bothers you. This depends on the individual's physiology, past experiences, state of wellbeing etc. Currently there is an emphasis on the physical safety of helicopters at the exclusion of all else.

Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Fly Neighbourly Advice -- see attachment Helicopter operations (5).

- Airspace over the city is uncontrolled. Class G predominantly light aircraft. Frequency and flight movements are unregulated.
- Chris at CASA said that legally helicopters can fly at 1000 feet. Note that this is above sea level, so if you live on a hill in a top floor flat they are much closer.
- The attachment recommends that circulating helicopters fly at 2000 feet. Helicopters often circle over the area 3 times during joy rides, and the height recommendation is ignored.
- If you suspect a helicopter is flying too low, then CASA need the number on the side or underneath of the helicopter to take action. This is impossible to see without huge magnification e.g. telescope.
- Airport curfews 6am – 11 pm. Helicopter flights occur anytime during these hours. Emergency flights are exempted of course.

Spring Racing Carnival

During the Spring Racing Carnival helicopters are used to transport racegoers from Olympic Park, to the racecourses. Previously it was Gosch's Paddock in Richmond.

- Helicopters don't need airports because of their vertical landing and take-off capacity. Can land and take off in uncontrolled airspace.
- Olympic Park is not a permanent landing site and it appears the management are not bound by the regulations of permanent heliports. They can make their own decisions what to do with the land (according to Joel Twining at Victorian State Govt – Department of Planning, Manager of Legislation who was involved in developing regulations for permanent helipads).
- I have contacted, but not heard back from, the Trust managers and Heliserv chief pilot to confirm that there are no permits required.
- In other words, there appears to be no limit on the frequency of flights to and from Olympic Park any day of the Racing week – including Saturday, Sunday, public holidays i.e. Cup day. Height limits are not enforced because helicopters are landing and taking off. There is no apparent consideration for residential areas.
- Official figures given to me by Airservices Australia: 75 helicopter flights on Cup Day within 0.5 km vicinity of my flat. I could see up to 4 in sky at one time, flying past my windows to land in Olympic Park. The only time there was a significant lull was during the Cup.

- Compare the regulation of flights from permanent landing sites. Not more than 4 in 24 hours, not more than 8 in 30 days and not within 1 km of sensitive areas.

Outcome of my query/complaint – as an example

A woman called Pravina at Airservices Australia responded by email to my phone enquiry about excessive helicopter noise during a particularly weekend in December.

“Your home in South Yarra is affected by helicopter movements and noise due to its close proximity to several landmarks, points of interest and services. These helicopters are either providing a service such as traffic reports, reporting on events, sports and news, emergency services (ambulance/police), joy and tourists flights and training.

Your home is in close proximity to:

- *Government House*
- *Shrine of Remembrance*
- *Royal Botanic Gardens*
- *Yarra River*
- *Melbourne Park*
- *Albert Park*
- *Melbourne Cricket Ground*
- *Melbourne Victory Football Club – AAMI Park*
- *Rod Laver Arena*
- *Flemington Race Course*
- *The Alfred Hospital*
- *The Royal Children’s Hospital*
- *The Royal Melbourne Hospital”*

They supplied figures for the weekend of 14-16 December 2013. **144** aircraft within 1 km radius of my house. 90 of these were within half a km radius.

Same weekend 2008 47 aircraft

Same weekend 2012 38 aircraft

I was told the increase was due to helicopter joy rides, and the report ended “I am sorry that I cannot offer any solutions but I hope this information will be of assistance to you.”

I have spoken to Shelley Faubel, the East Melbourne Group representative. They have approached the Noise, information and complaints service, Airservices Australia Ombudsman, Media, Politicians and Councillors. They did succeed in stopping a traffic helicopter regularly hovering over East Melbourne at 5 am.

The recent Leader article was circulated Moving helicopter traffic to neighbouring suburbs is clearly not the answer.

WebTrak - <http://www.airservicesaustralia.com/aircraftnoise/webtrak>

WebTrak allows anyone to get information about where and how high aircraft fly over metropolitan areas. It displays a map of surrounding suburbs within 55km of a selected airport. You can view information about arriving and departing aircraft, from three months earlier up to just 40 minutes ago. After selecting an aircraft, you can make a complaint about that flight.

My conclusion

In my view, we need an inner city Melbourne agreement that works fairly for everyone, including pilots and residents, and is enforceable by law.

References

- (1) Non military helicopter noise study by Federal Aviation Administration Report to US Congress, 2004
- (2) Report by UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, June 2008
- (3) <http://www.research-in-germany.de/dachportal/en/Research-Landscape/News/2014/01/2014-01-07-dlr-researchers-first-to-make-causes-of-helicopter-noise-visible.html>
- (4) <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/politics/2014/02/16/15852/schiff-disappointed-with-faa-progress-on-helicopte/>
- (5) <http://www.airservicesaustralia.com>

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