

28 November 2023

Director, Aviation White Paper Project Office
Aviation White Paper
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Director,

Re: Aviation Green Paper

The Cradle Coast Authority is pleased to respond to the *Aviation Green Paper*.

The paper provides a good overview of the opportunities and challenges associated with the future growth, adaptability and prosperity of the aviation industry in Australia. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts is to be commended for taking a consultative approach to these matters, and for drawing on the expertise and experience, including that of remote and regional Australia; to guide the next generation of growth and innovation in the aviation sector.

The Cradle Coast Authority (CCA) is a regional development organisation on the north west coast of Tasmania, representing eight councils in our region. We are responsible for promoting and facilitating sustainable economic and social development across the Cradle Coast region. We collaborate with local governments, communities, and industries to address regional challenges, enhance infrastructure, and support initiatives that contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of our area.

The role of aviation in remote and regional communities

We are pleased to see a recognition of the important role of general aviation. The *Aviation Green Paper* rightly points out that General Aviation is a diverse and evolving sector that plays a variety of important roles including servicing regional communities, delivering education and health services, regional freight and transport, tourism, recreation, agricultural mustering and spraying, instructional flying, sport and pleasure flying, and emergency services.

We are pleased to see an inclusion of aviation's role in the economy. The *Aviation Green Paper* rightly points out that aviation is critical to Australia's domestic connectivity, international supply chains, tourism, mining, construction, manufacturing and higher education sectors.

We note there is not a specific mention in Section 4 *Regional and remote aviation services* of Tasmania as an island state and connections to King and Flinders Islands or other islands. While we support the comments from WA on the importance for aviation to remote communities, for our region we would take it a step further as the option of road transport is not an option for island communities, the only options are by air or sea. While the Hobart and Launceston airports

are leased federal airports (LFAs) the Aviation White Paper should not focus just on the airports for which there is direct responsibility but provide a strategic framework for aviation connecting communities across the nation. Further detail on King Island as an example is provided below.

The benefits of investing in Tasmania's regional and remote airports

We strongly agree that investment should be guided by place-based decision-making that draws on the experience of local government alongside regional bodies to guide investment in our regions. And that the Australian Government's investments in regional aviation should deliver on the potential of regional Australia and build on each region's unique strengths.

As such, we endorse the role of the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework to underpin a strategic approach to regional investment, and value local voices, the places they live in, the services they rely on and the vital regional industries and local economies.

On the north west coast of Tasmania, airports function within a transport, storage, retail, agricultural and manufacturing economic ecosystem. Therefore, government investment has the potential to create significant knock-on benefits for multiple sectors. These additional benefits can be in the form of thought leadership, local capacity building and cross sectoral collaboration to maximise the utilisation of government resources and investment.

We believe investment in new technologies when trialing (or piloting) new initiatives in smaller north west coast airports will be advantageous, as new technologies can be implemented at a lower cost and operations have the capacity to be more agile.

We note that Devonport airport is in close proximity to significant feedstock for aviation biofuels, adjacent vacant land for enabling net zero initiatives, as well as value-adding opportunities.

The role of aviation and renewable energy projects on the north west coast of Tasmania

As we transition to net zero economy, the Australian Government's investment in the aviation industry has the potential to play a catalyst role in regional and remote north west coast of Tasmania.

We see aviation as being key to the future growth and prosperity of our region. The north west coast is on the cusp of significant change. The Tasmanian Government is currently looking at the north west coast becoming the first Renewable Energy Zone in the state and there are more than \$10 billion of renewable energy projects in the pipeline. The current Gross Regional Product of the north west coast region is **\$7.75 billion**, so this investment is expected to have a remarkable influence on our broader workforce needs. (<https://economy.id.com.au/tasmania/gross-regional-product?WebID=410>)

Renewable energy projects will create demand for aviation to supply the additional skilled workforce that will not be available locally, so has potential to compete with the needs of existing community members who rely on aviation for services such as healthcare and education. This raises questions of responsibility and which level of government/private sector should fund additional capacity.

Master planning and community consultation

We strongly support the stated ambition of the Australian Government's to ensure that 'no one is held back and no one is left behind. We understand that master planning and community consultation will be important elements of this work and will minimize scope for future conflicts between land uses. We ask that while this work is imperative for more populous parts of Australia, that these changes are very carefully undertaken to avoid creating negative unintended consequences in remote and regional Tasmania, where structural changes may inadvertently bring further disadvantage and increase the disparity between regions and metropolitan areas. This may happen if the masterplan process is unnecessarily cumbersome, delaying investment and growth or increasing the cost of future development. The needs of remote and regional Tasmania are different and master planning and community consultation rules need to be place-based and relevant to the regions that are required to adhere to these requirements.

The benefits of investing in aviation workforce development in north west Tasmania

Remote and regional Australia provide unique characteristics for training and workforce development. Due to the smaller size of remote airports, staff are exposed to many more aspects of aviation than what they would have access to in a larger and more siloed structure inherent in the larger airports.

Regional airports are therefore a valuable training ground for our future workforce and this needs to be recognised as a strength in the structure of workforce training in the Aviation White Paper.

Future Virtual Reality (VR) options will provide opportunities to create valuable learning experiences in many regional and remote locations. From the perspective of remote communities, aviation training VR equipment could link together with other highly skilled occupations that are difficult to train in remote areas. Therefore, a flexible, collaborative and innovate program has the potential to provide benefits across multiple sectors.

Currently in our region we have a project exploring 'The Feasibility of a Virtual Training Hub Establishment in the Northwest for the emerging Renewables and Energy Sector'. There is an opportunity to create cross-sector benefits and leverage off work already in train. There is growing interest in the applications of Extended Reality (XR) and simulation learning technologies. Virtual Reality (VR), as one of the key components of XR, has substantial potential to provide immersive, experiential learning opportunities for workers and trainees in a low-risk training environment. Such simulated experience with complex procedures and equipment can lead to improved work-related knowledge and understanding. XR also has distinct advantages for rural and remote communities as it can be used for remote collaboration, communication and training, allowing learners to participate in virtual simulations from anywhere and anytime.

King Island

It is challenging for local communities to fund small regional airports in remote Australia.

King Island has a population of 1,600 people. A refurbishment of the runway could cost \$8 million. Which can be described as a cost of \$5,000 per person. This is a huge cost for a community where the median household income is \$1,330 a week and King Island only has 838 resident workers (<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA63410>; <https://economy.id.com.au/tasmania/labourforce-key-statistics?WebID=270>).

The only way for residents of King Island to move on and off the island, is by air, passenger sea travel is not an option. In addition, “the suitability of the ship John Duigan to continue to provide freight services to King Island has been questioned” (King Island Courier, 16 November 2023, p.2). With no option to drive, the airport links the islanders to healthcare services, education and many other basic economic enablers.

Finally, the Cradle Coast Authority acknowledges the Australian Government’s intention to guide the next generation of growth and innovation in the aviation sector and we look forward to engaging with place-based initiatives that provide cross-sectoral benefits.

Kind Regards,



Sheree Vertigan AM

Chief Executive Officer