

**Submission Number: NND.001.01357**

**Submission Of: David edmunds**

**Your Details**

Email address:

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Preferred means of contact: Phone

What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise? aviation

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation?

**Your Submission**

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Provision for Aviation Emergency Services in the Canberra region

In January 2003, bushfires that started to the west and south-west of Canberra roared into the city destroying over 500 houses and killing two people. The fires were accentuated by droughty, blustery weather.

Similar conditions at the end of 2019 drove fires that started to the south west of the city to the very edge of the southern suburbs, before being halted at least in part by a fortuitous wind change. These fires had the potential to produce more damage than the 2003 fires.

While these events were 17 years apart because of climate change we can expect those risky conditions to become more prevalent.

Following the 2003 fires a group of pilots in Canberra got together to promote the establishment of a second airport just south of the city at Williamsdale, adjacent to the Monaro Highway. The proposal was that the airport would be of the scale of a regional airport such as Cowra, and would fulfil two functions. It would provide a base for general aviation and this activity would support the operation of the airport which would in turn provide a base for emergency aviation services.

The site at Williamsdale would be capable of servicing a wide range of emergency aircraft, up to and including Hercules.

As Canberra Airport has grown into a substantial regular passenger transport hub, general aviation has been squeezed out, leaving no facility within the Canberra region to support general and recreational aviation. The closest such general aviation airports to Canberra are at Goulburn and Polo Flat in north Cooma, both around 100Kms from Canberra.

During the recent bushfire emergency, water-bombing aircraft were a regular sight as they traversed the city from Canberra Airport in the north-east of the city to the fires in the south-west. Canberra Airport is about as far from the likely genesis of a fire that would threaten Canberra as it is possible to get in the ACT. Because of the travel time from Canberra airport to the fires, and the need for water bombing at high frequency to be effective there is a need for a larger number of aircraft if they are tasked this far from a fire.

Emergency aviation operations such as water-bombing directed at any likely fire threatening Canberra, tasked from Williamsdale would save around 25 minutes flying time each way. As the proposed airport would be outside of the Canberra controlled airspace the sequencing of aircraft would be much more streamlined than operations originating from the controlled airspace environment at Canberra Airport, in addition to the saving of flight time.

there is a vast area of heavily-wooded mountainous country to the south-west of Canberra, including the Brindabella and Tidbinbilla Ranges, and the huge Namadgi and Kosciusko national parks. Tumut to the east of this area has the only airport capable of hosting emergency aviation services to service this area other than temporary facilities. There is no facility to the west of the area, hence the sub-optimal use of Canberra Airport for this purpose.

The proposal for a second airport garnered significant support from then Chief Minister Mr Jon Stanhope, who commissioned a sequence of studies into the proposal, following a comprehensive scoping study by officers of his directorate. These studies showed that the site suggested was suitable from an aviation point of view. A parallel environmental assessment showed no significant problem. The ACT Government commissioned a study from Deloitte Access Economics on the financial viability of the operation of the proposed airport which showed that under the worst case conditions, general aviation operations at the airport would generate a profit.

Therefore, emergency aviation operations would effectively be underwritten by the general aviation operations.

Following Mr Stanhope's resignation as Chief Minister the proposal stalled. It is not clear why this was the case. The ostensible reason given was that the Airport would not generate a high enough profit. Various Freedom of Information requests showed that this was not a criterion that was ever applied with respect to government infrastructure in the ACT.

In the 1950s following the introduction of prop-jet aircraft into regular public transport the need for a second general aviation airport in Canberra, to separate the fast jet traffic from slower piston-powered aircraft was considered. A number of studies have been undertaken, suggesting a number of different sites, but as the city has grown these sites have been overtaken by development and are no longer viable. Williamsdale is one of the very few possible remaining sites with the ACT and the only site that gives close access to the likely seat of future fires.

Further, while there may be sites further to the south in NSW adjacent to the Monaro Highway that offer similar access to the wooded country in the hills to the west, the economic support of the airport is predicated on access to the airport by the Canberra community, and as the distance from the city increases, so the likely patronage of the airport also decreases.

The development of an airport at Williamsdale is a very low-cost venture, particularly as much of the ancillary development such as the provision of hangars would be undertaken through private investment.

We can reasonably expect another such catastrophic event within a decade, and notwithstanding the extraordinary work of Canberra's emergency services personnel, we might not be so lucky next time.

David Edmunds

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name

Supporting material provided:

Royal Commission Fires.pdf

## **Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements**

### **Provision for Aviation Emergency Services in the Canberra region**

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