



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Aviation: Bankstown Airport

SPEECH

Thursday, 8 March 2001

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Melham, Daryl, MP	Question No.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (11.44 am)—The people of south-western Sydney continue to be betrayed by the Howard government. I refer specifically to the callous decision taken by the government in December 2000 to allow jet aircraft into Bankstown Airport. This decision is clearly an attempt at short-term political gain by a government which heartlessly believes it has nothing to lose by alienating the people of south-western Sydney. The community is being treated with scorn by a government which persists in disregarding the views of people whose quality of life will be impacted by this cruel decision.

Why is there such contempt for the people of Bankstown and the neighbouring areas? Consider the electorates surrounding Bankstown airport: Banks, Blaxland, Lowe, Reid, Watson, Barton, Fowler and Hughes. Apart from the last, what do all these electorates have in common? That is right; they are all held by the ALP, with the exception of Hughes, and even there, coalition voters must have begun to question the extent to which their interests are being represented. The naked self-interest and political game-playing evidenced by this government are crass in the extreme.

The decision to allow expansion to accommodate jets at Bankstown Airport is totally at odds with the views of the people of Bankstown and the surrounding areas not that the government would be aware of this; they have not asked. The decision is contrary to the findings of any of the previous studies on the utilisation of Bankstown Airport. Had any community consultation taken place, the government would be aware that the majority of people living in and working around Bankstown are used to living with the airport. They are accustomed to the fact that the airport ranks fifth highest in the world in relation to general aviation movements. People purchased homes in the areas and established lives for themselves and their families knowing that Bankstown Airport functioned as a busy airport which provided local employment. They did not purchase their homes on the basis of a massive increase in noise levels and air pollution from jets, which will be the direct result on their lives from this malicious decision by a government in trouble.

The Bankstown community coexists with the airport as it is, but they want no expansion of jet movements into the community. My electorate office and, I am sure, those of my colleagues in the surrounding electorates, are receiving a significant number of queries each week from worried members of the public who are concerned that they should consider moving from the area. In addition, there has been no consideration of even minimal infrastructure to support any expansion to accommodate jets. We have a picture of a community that is seriously concerned about the future.

The lack of interest by a jaded government in consulting with the people it purports to represent is most clearly evidenced by the lack of an environmental impact statement. The 1997 EIS completed for Badgerys Creek found that Bankstown Airport was not viable for jet aircraft. Any change in the airport function would have a significant impact on the existing general aviation facilities as well as raising environmental issues for the nearby communities. Any changes, according to that EIS, would still not satisfy long-term air travel demand for Sydney.

We in south-western Sydney are used to being held in contempt by this government. Only a few years ago, Holsworthy was announced as an option for a second Sydney airport. When, and only when, community outrage was articulated was there any response to that anger, and the government performed one of its ongoing backflips. The campaign against Holsworthy has blooded the people in and around my electorate. We will be taking the debate up to and in the face of this cynical government. Community action, with the support of the local councils, commenced days after the announcement in December. At a rally of over 3,000 people in February, there was no-one present prepared to attempt a justification for the government's decision.

This government has refused to learn from its mistakes. Once again, a decision is announced before any consideration is given to the consequences of that decision. Over recent weeks we have seen myriad examples of the lack of forethought given to its decisions by this government and the resulting backflips required to placate voters—desperate attempts by a desperate Prime Minister. No wonder the polls are reflecting what the Australian public has known for some time. The voters, including those in my own electorate of Banks, are not so easily

fooled. This decision on Bankstown Airport was thoughtless and mean-spirited. In 2000, the Prime Minister ruined Christmas for the people of Bankstown. I can assure the Prime Minister that his present for Christmas 2001 will be to pack his bags and leave Kirribilli House, as he searches for a new home after the election. The people of south-western Sydney and, indeed, across the country, will return in kind the contempt in which this Prime Minister holds them.