



Kingborough

BRUNY ISLAND AIRSTRIP EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

SUMMARY

Council is seeking Expressions of Interest from interested parties that would be prepared to be responsible for the management and operation of the existing Bruny Island Airstrip. This includes the necessary upgrading of the Airstrip, its ongoing maintenance and all future operational arrangements.

This public airstrip is being increasingly used for private purposes and, like all such airstrips, is subject to fairly stringent regulatory requirements. Council is reviewing the future management options for the airstrip and, in order to do so, it is necessary to identify if there are any other potential interests.

Council is open to any Expression of Interest, though will favour those that are prepared to be responsible for all management and operational responsibilities. This paper is provided as background information so that Council's current position can be understood. Expressions of Interest should include the following information:

1. A description of the proposal, including any terms and conditions of tenure.
2. Proposed future public availability of the Airstrip.
3. Any proposed requirements on Council.
4. Experience of proponent and capacity to manage this airstrip.

All Expressions of Interest should be submitted to Council by Friday 9th March 2018 and addressed to the General Manager. Further information can be obtained by contacting Tony Ferrier at 6211 8292 or tferrier@kingborough.tas.gov.au.

Following receipt of the Expressions of Interest, Council will review the available options and consider the relative merits of each submission against each of the four abovementioned criteria. It is likely that there will be a need to have further discussions with some proponents. It is Council's intention to make a decision on the future operation and management of the airstrip as soon as practicable.

BACKGROUND

Bruny Island Airstrip is located just north of the Neck on Bruny Island Main Road, Great Bay. The property is owned by Council and part of the land is currently leased to a private commercial operator (Island Scenic Flights) where an aircraft hangar and office has been constructed.

The land was originally donated to the Bruny Island community and ownership was transferred to the Bruny Island Council. The original airstrip was built by community volunteers. It was officially opened by the State Government's Transport Minister in 1963. The airstrip was transferred to Kingborough Council at the time of council amalgamations in 1993.

Council has recently been concerned about its capacity to maintain and operate the airstrip in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Various matters relating to the inspection and maintenance requirements were considered in 2008 and 2010 and the necessary maintenance and upgrade works were carried out in order to meet the CASA safety requirements.

In 2010 Council issued a planning permit and an occupational license to allow a commercial operator, Island Scenic Flights, to utilise the airstrip for commercial scenic flights. An aircraft hangar and office were constructed and Island Scenic Flights has been operating at this site since that time. The current license is over an area that includes the aircraft hangar and office and is for a term of 20 years (expires 1/3/2033) with an option for an additional 20 years from the completion of the term of the license.

Council has a statutory obligation to ensure that the airstrip complies with the minimum standards adopted by CASA as stated within the Civil Aviation Advisory Publication 92-1(1) *Guidelines for Aeroplane Landing Areas*. CASA Regulation Part 135 relates to Australian Air Transport Operations for Small Aeroplanes and is yet to come into effect (though original consultation on the proposed changes commenced almost 20 years ago). It may introduce higher standards for charter operators on such airstrips as at Bruny Island.

Another Civil Aviation Safety Regulation requirement is that Council must appoint an airport manager. Airservices is Australia's air navigation service provider – in regard to air traffic control, aviation rescue and fire-fighting and air navigation services. They hold and maintain current contact details of owner/operators of Aircraft Landing Areas. Such owner/operators are required to register with Airservices and nominate a responsible person – otherwise referred to as an Aeronautical Data Originator. This person then must obtain a Data Product Specification to ensure all data relating to the airstrip is exchanged through a quality controlled process.

The use of the airstrip by pilots and aircraft is largely under the discretion of the individual pilot and this is, under the current circumstances, largely unregulated. The Civil Aviation Advisory Publication No: 92-1(1) provides guidelines for aeroplane landing areas such as the Bruny airstrip, however these are guidelines only. CASA takes no active role in ensuring small airstrips such as this comply with what are effectively only guidelines rather than rules.

CURRENT SITUATION

The airstrip is currently available for general public use and no landing fees are charged. It is used a few times every day of the week, with Island Scenic Flights being the main user. There is other usage by private individuals, tourist operators, aeronautical clubs and for training purposes. The airstrip is not being used for emergency services (according to information supplied by the Tasmanian Fire Service, Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Bruny State emergency Services). A common view within the Bruny Island community is that the airstrip should always be retained in public ownership as a local community asset and that it should continue to be available for public use.

Council insures the facility and carries the liability for its use. The airstrip is inspected on a weekly basis by Council and essential maintenance is carried out.

Council has routinely commissioned reports on the condition of the airstrip by a specialist consultant. The latest report was undertaken by Airports Plus Pty Ltd in April 2017. This report included the following maintenance and upgrade recommendations:

- The pavement should be regravelled within the next 1-2 years due to the loss of fines as a direct result of the increased use following the establishment of charter and joy flights business.
- The requirements from the CASA require a total runway strip width of 60m. Vegetation has encroached into this area and in some areas this is in the region of 5-10m encroachment. This vegetation needs to be removed.
- The wick off the edge of the gravel runway needs to be removed. The wick was approximately 300mm with a vertical face. While this is an effective drainage practice for rural roads it was considered to be a potentially fatal practice adjacent to runways. It should be noted that this was immediately rectified by Council upon receipt of this advice.

This report from Airports Plus also identified the following concerns:

- The airstrip is being inspected by persons who are not familiar with the specific requirements for maintaining airstrips, though this can be remedied by specific training.
- Neighbouring property owners and tenants have unrestricted access to the site.
- Tree growth is an issue on either side of the runway strip and also approach and take off areas which is contained on land that Council does not own or control.

The report concluded that any of these risks could be considered as potentially catastrophic, as similar hazards have been attributed to fatalities in the past at other airstrips. While the Airport Plus report has identified some potentially dangerous aspects of the current use, it does not appear that such use is necessarily in breach of any laws, regulations or other requirements of a Federal, State or local authority.

Council's regular maintenance requirements include a maintenance grade once per year, a roll with a heavy roller twice a year, weed and grass spraying once a year, slashing once per year, a weekly inspection and ensuring the inspection officer is adequately trained. In order to implement the further works indicated as necessary by the Airports Plus report, a one-off

works program includes vegetation removal, airstrip resheeting and boundary fencing to ensure security of the airstrip (from wallabies and unauthorised entry). A license fee of \$1,750.00 per annum (indexed to CPI) is received each year from the existing licensee. In June 2017, Council obtained a market valuation of the land and it was determined to be \$120,000.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing management of the Bruny Island airstrip must be in full accord with the relevant regulations. Not to do so is untenable from both a legal and a risk management perspective. However it is questionable as to whether Council has the in-house expertise required to operate an airstrip and whether this is the type of facility that should be managed by a council, particularly when it is apparently only used for private purposes.

Another operator may be much better suited to this task and be able to ensure that the airstrip is always provided for the use of those who can benefit from its ongoing availability. For Council, there is always the risk that eventually the regulatory requirements will not be able to be met and that the airstrip must be closed. As a result, it is now necessary to further explore other options and this can only be done by initially seeking expressions of interests from potentially alternative operators.

At this stage, it is Council's preference that it retain the airstrip and lease or licence it to a private operator or group who would be responsible for its upgrade and ongoing maintenance and operation. There are of course other options that are a variation of this and they do include a transfer in ownership (with appropriate covenants on the title if necessary). Council is trying to avoid the need to close the airstrip and sell the property, but may have no other alternative if there are no reasonable Expressions of Interest.