

**Kelvin Thomson MP  
Federal Member for Wills**

**Speech to the Close Essendon Airport  
Committee Rally**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008**

Thank you all for coming along today to demonstrate your commitment to the cause of relocating the planes from Essendon Airport to more suitable locations.

The number of people here today is yet another clear indication of where community sentiment on this issue lies. People living in this area want the aviation operations to move. It is time to move the planes to a safer, quieter location. Essendon Airport is past its used by date.

The strong sentiment is also reflected in the number and context of submissions made by local residents in response to the Essendon Airport Draft Master Plan. Early this year I urged local residents to look at the plan and to prepare individual responses to it.

Many local residents took up the challenge to do so. The Draft Master Plan received 180 submissions, and 80% of those proposed that the airport be closed. And there is no doubt that this is what needs to happen. I have now been campaigning in this issue, I am somewhat sad to say, for over 20 years. I made my first public call for the Airport to close in early 1988, as a then Coburg Councillor and much younger man.

The past 20 years have been a source of great frustration. I was convinced that the Airport would close fifteen years ago when the 1993 crash of a Hawker de Havilland dove

into 5 Gilbertson Street North Essendon homes drove home the message that this Airport has no margin for error- it is surrounded by residential homes, and errors in take off or landing carry the clear risk of catastrophe.

I welcomed the announcement by then Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1996 that Essendon would close, and the announcement in 2001 by Labor's Shadow Transport Minister at the time, Martin Ferguson, that a Labor Government would relocate planes from Essendon. Of course those announcements were not followed by election victories and it is unfortunate that the Liberal and National Parties have always chosen to not only support Essendon as an ongoing aviation facility, but to run it as a political issue.

This is evident from the recent submission by the Victorian opposition to the Essendon Draft Master Plan, which opposes the closure of Essendon and attacks State Labor for proposing it. It is also evident from the regular inflammatory statements inside and outside Parliament by Liberal MP Bernie Finn on this issue.

It is also regrettable that the former Federal National Party Leader John Anderson transferred the airport to private operation in 1998 under a 50 year lease with a 49 year renewal option, with lease conditions requiring the operator to use the land as an airport.

This does not make the airport impossible to close, though that was certainly John Anderson's intention, but it certainly makes matters far more complicated and the subject of discussion between government and the private lease operators.

The new federal government has undertaken the Draft Master Plan process, as it is legally obliged to do, and has

taken the view that it would not be appropriate to comment on Essendon's future while that process is undertaken. That is not unreasonable. But it is certainly a matter of the utmost interest to me, as no doubt it is to you, as to what happens once the Draft Master Plan process is concluded.

I have put to the Transport Minister directly, as I have stated publicly, that this is an airport which has outlived its usefulness and should be moved. I have also put the view that under no circumstances should the Draft Master Plan process lead to a relaxation of the curfew or to any intensification of aviation activity.

On the contrary, as I argued in my joint submission with State MP Judy Maddigan, the curfew should be reworded to become a real curfew, so that residents are not kept awake by planes landing or taking off at night, and that immediate and present problems of noise and fumes are addressed.

People will say where will the planes go if you close Essendon? The answer is the corporate jets can go to Tullamarine and Avalon, both of which have spare corporate jet capacity. And Bacchus Marsh, Wallan, Lilydale, Coldstream, Sunbury, Tyabb, Barrow Heads, Ballarat etc. All have airfields which are already taking light planes away from Essendon because they are significantly smaller, have lower cost structures, fewer regulations and can instigate lower landing fees than Essendon.

Only two days ago Premier John Brumby said 'trainee pilots should practise in regional areas away from urban centres'. He's right.

I believe this issue is one whose time has come, that it can be won and I thank you and the Close Essendon

Airport Committee for your support and your commitment to winning it.

Thank you.

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