

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

Thank you for your feature 'GA Under Threat' in the September issue. The article illustrates the underlying forces behind the turmoil that has plagued GA for decades.

The 'Chamber of Commerce' at Archerfield embodies a culture of entitlement that exists among a vocal minority of GA participants throughout Australia. They liaise with similar minority elements at other airports to nurture their clamour. This extended minority brings discredit to us all.

The spokesmen deny our democratic system of government. They bitterly denounce the Conservatives and they demonize Labor. They threaten their elected local representatives, whatever their persuasion.

They repudiate the rule of law by denying the lease arrangements they contracted with the Commonwealth. They say they never wanted to sign their leases – the Government made them do it. Then they cite some conversation with groundstaff or a public servant that they interpret as assuring them of possession in perpetuity under terms and conditions dictated by themselves.

They bitterly lament that the government failed to give "their" airport to them. They are perplexed that their combined economic might was bypassed by the Commonwealth in preference for management of Archerfield by a local family company. They assert that the sale process conducted by the Office of Asset Sales was corrupted.

They seek to preserve "their" subsidized environment. They claim that Archerfield Airport Corporation has an agenda to close the airport. At the same time, they oppose every endeavour to revitalize Archerfield and to enhance the capacity of the aerodrome.

They invoke agencies of government in an attempt to frustrate revitalization. They plot interventionist strategies to take advantage of the democratic processes that they themselves deny. They make allegations to the Minister, then to CASA, then to the ACCC, then to the AAT, then to the Premier's Department. They do so under the cloak of 'whistleblower' protection so they are exempt from accountability for their actions. Then, when their allegations are disproved or rejected, they delude themselves that there has been a cover-up and they begin a fresh round of the same allegations.

In their wild zeal, they have no notion of the damage they cause. They do not have the imagination or the vision to see a vibrant future for Archerfield. They cannot even acknowledge the regeneration that has already taken place.

For a decade we have tolerated their bitter excesses. We would like to continue to ignore their activities but we can no longer afford to do so. Too often we find ourselves having to reassure would-be investors in GA at Archerfield that there is no substance to the scuttlebutt spread by these schemers. Progressive companies at Archerfield are impeded by the disinformation that is about.

People who are familiar with the Australian General Aviation scene shrug and form their own opinions. Others from outside the industry don't have the background to sift through the chaff. The impediment is greatest with foreign clients who cannot interpret the motivation of the nay-sayers.

Next year Archerfield Airport Corporation proposes an exciting modification to our Master Plan. The modification outlines a framework for the higher and better use of the aerodrome. We have a duty to make sure the plan is not derailed by misinformation. That is why we have chosen to expose the mind set behind the 'GA Under Threat' piece.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has prepared a response to a number of accusations made by AACCI against Archerfield Airport Corporation. It has also prepared a response to a REPCON from a protected source. The source alleges safety and procedural breaches by Archerfield Airport Corporation in the discharge of its responsibilities.

The reports will be released in association with an extensive investigation into a Pans-Ops matter at Archerfield. This is one of the few times such an extensive investigation has been conducted in Australia into a matter that did not involve an accident. It should be of concern to all of us in aviation that the resources of both Government and Archerfield Airport Corporation have, for a decade, been distracted by investigations into mischievous allegations.

When the reports are out you might care to continue your expose of threats to the future of GA. You will have a base line against which you can judge the veracity of all the information you are supplied with.

There could be no better subject than the conduct of the Archerfield Airport Chamber of Commerce Incorporated. When that is completed you might then care to illuminate the shadowy character who is pulling the strings of the organization from behind the scene.

Gavin J. Bird AM

Managing Director

Miengrove Pty Ltd.

As predicted in our previous issue, our 'GA Under Threat' article has spurred much debate, comment and controversy. The article put forward the forthright views of a group of activists at Archerfield airport who are convinced that the airport is under threat of closure. As is ever the case, there are two opposing sides to the story and the following is the airport's reply. We are certain that this won't be the end of the issue but hope that the ongoing skirmishes settle down and the greater good of aviation is served.