



environmental
protection uk

To: Hilary Benn – Secretary of State for the Environment
Cc: Ruth Kelly – Secretary of State for Transport
Dawn Primarolo – Minister of State for Health

13 February 2008

Dear Mr Benn

Robust Research on the Health Impacts of Aviation Noise

As we move towards the first noise action plans, to be drawn up for July, Environmental Protection UK¹ are urging Ministers across departments that any decisions on air transport infrastructure should take full account of EU noise policy objectives, which are to reduce exposure to high levels of transport noise. Today, press are reporting yet another new report, linking aircraft noise to raised blood pressure.² The noise objective of the Sixth Environmental Action Programme, is “to achieve reduction of the number of people regularly affected by long-term high noise levels from an estimated 100 million people in the year 2000, by around 10% in 2010 and by 20% in 2020”, and of the Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC (END) is “to avoid, prevent or reduce on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise.” They should also take account of the objectives of the imminently expected draft Noise Strategy England.

Under the END, noise action planning is intended to be a mechanism to enable the management of the effects of noise from transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic and from sites of industrial activity and to reduce it if necessary, in order to avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects of exposure on people.

With ongoing consultation on the expansion of Heathrow, we believe that the ANASE² report on attitudes to aviation noise cannot be left in the current ‘limbo’ in which it effectively resides, if we are to have a coherent cross-departmental national approach to noise which commands public confidence.

While we recognise the concerns of government advisers and peer reviewers regarding unorthodox research methodologies and flaws in the ANASE report, we believe that it does provide sufficient evidence to indicate that people are more annoyed at lower levels than the Department for Transport has been assuming, based on 1982 ANIS data, and that the number of aircraft noise events, as opposed to the overall amount of noise energy, is also more important than the Department has been assuming. Both ANASE and recent work commissioned to establish the basis for increasing membership of the Heathrow Campaign Against Noise (HACAN)³, find increasingly that people are annoyed beyond the 57 dB(A) contours around airports, currently used to monitor impact. The recent EU funded HYENA research⁴ also reinforces health concerns. There has been much

valuable work in other countries on aircraft noise impacts, such as German work on night noise reported by Basner et al.

We believe Government should urgently commission a review of such research, together with a technical assessment of ANASE. The latter would be able to go into more detail than was possible for the ANASE peer reviewers. The work, involving some statistical reanalysis, would maximise what can be gleaned for UK practice from the considerable public investment in ANASE. We believe that, without such a rapid review, it would be unsafe and could be open to legal challenge to continue to rely on 1982 data in assessing proposals such as at Heathrow. We do not believe that reliable decisions can be taken on such proposals until the outcome of this review.

We are sure you will agree that this reasonable and proportionate effort is fully justified if the implications for residents affected by aircraft noise are to be taken properly and transparently into account, and if our European and national policy objectives to manage noise appropriately are to be met.

Environmental Protection UK seek assurance from Government, that the noise and health implications of any development of airport infrastructure will be fully appraised prior to the making of decisions that have the potential to profoundly affect present and future communities, the increasingly rare quiet areas of our countryside, and will contribute to achieving a cleaner, quieter, healthier UK.

Yours Sincerely



Phillp Mulligan
Chief Executive
Environmental Protection UK

1. Environmental Protection UK are the charity bringing together environmental professionals, academics, policy makers and the public to work towards our vision of a cleaner, quieter, healthier world.
2. Acute Effects of Night Time Noise Exposure on blood pressure on populations living near airports, European Heart Journal, 12 Feb 2008
3. Attitudes to Noise From Aviation Sources in England - <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/aviation/environmentalissues/Anase/>
4. Aircraft Noise and London Heathrow Flightpaths at <http://www.hacan.org.uk/resources/reports/st06145.text.final.pdf>
5. HYENA (Hypertension and Exposure to Noise Near Airports) Report at <http://www.hyena.eu.com/>