

Community called on to support fight to secure airport's future

Wagga Wagga City Council is urging the local and wider regional community to get involved in its fight to retain the lease on the Wagga Wagga Airport, beyond June 2025 when the current lease expires.

Council has launched an advocacy campaign for the Commonwealth Department of Defence to enter into a new and improved lease with Council to operate this critical community asset.

Residents, businesses, regional councils and other stakeholders are being encouraged to write letters of support for renewing the lease to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence the Honourable Richard Marles MP, and to Member for Riverina the Honourable Michael McCormack MP, by 30 May 2024.

Community members can also add their voice of support through Council's [Have Your Say Wagga Wagga](#) website over the next four weeks, with the feedback received to be forwarded to relevant Ministers.

Mayor of the City of Wagga Wagga Councillor Dallas Tout is calling for broad community support for the fight to secure our airport's future.

"We want to see our airport stay in the community's hands; it plays a critical role as a social and economic lifeline for our whole region," Cr Tout said.

"It provides essential services and connection for the region to the rest of Australia, for families, individuals, businesses, education and health services, along with aviation training, maintenance, and general aviation.

"The airport is currently run with a community focus and with the emphasis on prioritising and optimising the broader economic and social needs to keep costs low for residents and businesses.

"We are concerned that privatisation will push up costs and create another barrier for people in our region.

"We need your help to let the Commonwealth Government know how privatisation of this vital infrastructure would impact you or your organisation."

Where other airports were gifted to communities, or sold to communities for a dollar, Wagga Wagga Airport is currently leased at around \$200,000 per year, with any improvements to the airport paid for by the community but owned by the Commonwealth Government.

An example of this is that Council recently constructed a taxiway at a cost of \$5.3 million, to which the Commonwealth Government did not contribute any funding.

Council's current 30-year lease of the airport from the Department of Defence is due to expire in June 2025.

According to the Mayor, while a formal determination from Defence has not yet been made, a decision to privatise the Wagga Wagga Airport through a commercial lease appears imminent.

"Ratepayers have made a significant financial contribution towards capital expenditure of the airport over the past 30 years, and we believe it should be treated as a community asset, not for private enterprise to profit from," Cr Tout said.

“We are hopeful that through advocacy the Commonwealth Government will reconsider its position and will not further disadvantage regional communities, but time is of the essence.

“There are just over 12 months remaining to resolve this issue, so please, get involved, get writing, or head online and let the government know you want to keep our airport in the community’s hands.

“It doesn’t have to be a long or complicated submission, we just want you to have the opportunity to voice what the airport and its services and accessibility mean to you, and how important you feel it is to maintain an airport where servicing the whole community is the priority, not making a profit.”

Submit your feedback and support the fight to save our airport online at haveyoursay.wagga.nsw.gov.au

You can also email it to us at council@wagga.nsw.gov.au or drop it in to the Customer Service team at our Civic Centre by Friday 14 June 2024.

The mailing address for Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence the Hon Richard Marles, and Member for Riverina the Hon Michael McCormack MP is:

PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Please also provide Council with a copy of any letters you forward through to Ministers by 30 May 2024 so we can add this to our overall advocacy submission.

Council wants to reach a resolution with Defence and will be making further representations to Richard Marles, Assistant Minister for Defence the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite, Michael McCormack once we compile further letters of support from stakeholders and the community.

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Contact 6926 9190 or media@wagga.nsw.gov.au

About Wagga Wagga City Council

Wagga Wagga City Council serves more than 68,000 residents across an area of 4825 square kilometres with an overall budget of more than \$236M.

The organisation manages more than \$2.48 billion in assets, including a 2300km road network, Wagga Wagga Airport, Livestock Marketing Centre and the Oasis Aquatic Centre.

Council also provides important community facilities such as Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga City Library, Museum of the Riverina and Civic Theatre, as well as maintaining countless parks, playgrounds and sporting facilities to ensure Wagga maintains its reputation as ‘the City of Good Sports’.

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