



Tom Gully

# ROYAL COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

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1 August 2003

Professor J E Banatvala  
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Photo Rhye R Enright

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Dear Professor Banatvala

You wrote on 11 June to Professor Holgate about the Royal Commission's report on the environmental effects of aircrafts in flight. Professor Holgate forwarded the letter to me.

I must start by apologising most profoundly for the delay in responding to you. Your letter arrived during a flurry of activity in the office here, and I fear that I misfiled and overlooked it. Fortunately your reminder prompted us to look for it.

The concerns you raise in your letter are about the impact of aviation, and particularly airport expansion, on health. We recognised in our Report that aircraft taking off and landing would have important health implications for those who live near airports. In particular, we mentioned local air pollution and noise. However, our report was about the way in which the expected expansion in air travel would contribute to climate change, because we feared that government had overlooked this topic. Although much is being done to reduce the emission of climate change gases from industrial and domestic sources, nothing at all has been done about those from aircraft. Because of radiative forcing, the impact of emissions from jet aircraft is almost three times that from land based sources. That, coupled with the growing demand for air transport and the reductions in carbon dioxide emissions from other sources mean that, unless steps are taken now to curtail demand, aviation will soon become the major factor driving climate change.

There are of course links with your concerns about local health impacts. Climate change will itself have health consequences. Also the steps needed to address our concerns (halting airport expansion and imposing a tax on air travel, for example) will also address your concerns. There is therefore considerable synergy between what the Royal Commission is proposing and your Committee's views.

I can assure you that the Royal Commission is continuing to press for changes in government policy on this subject. The Chairman has spoken to the Transport Secretary, to Environment Ministers and to Parliamentary Committees about our conclusions. We are pleased to see

reports endorsing our recommendations emerging from the Environmental Audit Committee and the Select Committee on Transport in the House of Commons. We are sure that the messages in our report are being listened to, but I fear that we have some way to go before we can be confident that our recommendations are being taken seriously by the Department of Transport. We will continue to press to ensure that our report is not, as you fear, cast aside by government departments.

I hope this reassurance is helpful, and sorry, again, for the delay in replying.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hinchcliffe', written in a cursive style.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE  
Secretary to the Commission