



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

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Submission to Melbourne Water RE: Yarra River plan

INTRODUCTION

Whitemark Property and Planning acts on behalf of Microflite, the biggest supplier of helicopter services in Victoria.

Microflite is based at Moorabin Airport but its primary piece of infrastructure to service the tourism market is its floating helipad on the Yarra River. Microflite employs 24 pilots, 11 engineers and 19 administration staff (see Appendix A for further details on Microflite's operations).

The purpose of this submission is to seek that the Melbourne Water plan for the Yarra River supports and secures the long term use of the floating helipad on the Yarra River at Batman Park, for the whole aviation industry.

BACKGROUND

Helicopters have been landing on the Yarra River in central Melbourne for over 50 years.

Microflite has been operating from central Melbourne for over 15 years and during this time it has provided a quality service which has been incident and accident free. Microflite holds a licence until at least 2025 on the helipad and significant investment has been made into new helicopters and personnel to service the business.

Microflite primarily transports tourists to events (including the Spring Racing Carnival, Moto Grand Prix, Formula 1 Grand Prix and Portsea Polo), regional tourist attractions and hospitality venues around Victoria. The table below shows the number and type of flights operated over the course of the past year.

| | Number of flights | Number of passengers |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Sporting events | 876 | 4 555 |
| Other events | 65 | 338 |
| Business clients | 307 | 1 105 |
| Sightseeing tours | 3 471 | 14 578 |
| Total | 4 719 | 20 576 |

The clientele can be categorised as follows:

Total passengers transported: 20 576
 International visitors: 10 411
 Domestic passengers: 10 165

Working in collaboration with Visit Victoria, Microflite delivers innovative and unique tourism, experiential, and sporting packages that promote the best Victoria has to offer. These packages are showcased as part of Tourism Victoria's promotional materials for the purpose of attracting international visitors to Victoria. Packages include food and wine experiences visiting Victoria's leading restaurants in the Yarra Valley, Birregurra, Mornington Peninsula and Bellarine Peninsula. Microflite also offers packages visiting the Twelve Apostles, the Grampians, Healesville Sanctuary, and Phillip Island.

Of the 20 576 passengers Microflite has flown, 15 638 of these have been delivered to an attraction or event, thereby multiplying the impact on Victoria's tourism economy.

Access to Melbourne's city centre not only allows the industry to promote Victorian tourism but is also critical to servicing the city's government and business clients that rely on ready proximity to the Central Business District and Southbank.

Central city access is also necessary for live to air filming of Victoria's Major Events Program including cycling, tennis, AFL, Melbourne's Formula 1 Grand Prix, Moto GP, V8s, and the Spring Racing Carnival.

Over the last ten years, Victoria's helicopter industry has continued to experience growth, creating jobs and investment in Victoria. Microflite is an example of this rapid growth. With one of the largest and most modern private fleets of helicopters in Australia, the company has an outstanding safety record and prides itself in taking a proactive approach to operating to the world's best standards.

HELICOPTER INDUSTRY NEEDS

Like any other industry, in order to continue to thrive and grow, Microflite needs certainty around the infrastructure that is fundamental to delivering its services. The success of its operations critically relies on its network of strategically located helipads across Victoria, including central city access.

The River Yarra is a particularly appropriate location for heliport facilities servicing central Melbourne given the safe flight path. For over 50 years the river has served as an ideal helicopter approach and departure path as it provides for clear and unobstructed flight profiles over both populous and un-built up parts of Melbourne.

Microflite helicopters follow the Yarra River and the port for approach and departure to minimise any impacts to inner city residents.

Microflite has committed to flying neighbourly particularly in central Melbourne to reduce the impact of aircraft noise on residents living in the city. In addition, Microflite aircraft in its specialised tourism fleet (four EC130s, three EC120s, and one EC135) feature low-noise tail rotor (fenestron) design with the shortest start up and shut down times to minimise impacts on residential amenity (unlike many other operators with older and noisier aircraft). These helicopters were originally developed for flights within the Grand Canyon National Park which is subject to stringent noise restrictions.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF CONTINUED HELIPAD ACCESS

The special operations group of the Victoria Police regularly uses the city helipad and during the recent tragic Bourke St incident the police air wing also utilised the CBD helipad. The helipad has also been used for medical emergencies. Microflite tries to always keep a spot on the helipad free for emergency services use.

Emergency landings in parks are hazardous due to trees, vegetation, street furniture and the impossibility of clearing a landing site of pedestrians without the assistance of ground staff.

To lose this safe access to the CBD for emergency services would be a great loss for Melbourne and will undoubtedly place lives at risk.

UBER AIR

Both the Victorian and the Federal Governments have invested considerable resources in securing Melbourne as the first international test city for urban aerial mobility. As the only city in Australia with a central city helipad this was a factor which influenced the choice of Melbourne for Uber Air trials.

While ultimately further landing facilities may be sought by Uber Air, there is no doubt that the Batman Park helipad will be necessary to enable the Victorian Government to deliver on its commitment to Uber Air trials and the wider emerging air taxi industry requirements.

CONCLUSION

Microflite's headquarters (including its state of the art maintenance facility) is at Moorabbin Airport where it houses its fleet of 19 aircraft. Recently, it has invested \$3.5 Million expanding its headquarters making way for further jobs growth and investment. Microflite is committed to the delivery of world class standards in its provision of services and maintaining its reputation as a leader in Australia's helicopter industry. However, a critical part of the infrastructure needs is a helipad located in central Melbourne.

Helicopter access to the city centre plays a fundamental role in the success of Melbourne's tourism industry, the dispersal of tourists to Victoria's regional attractions, and the delivery of emergency and government services. Furthermore, securing existing heliports and planning for additional permanent heliport sites is critical to achieving certainty for Melbourne's thriving helicopter industry.

As one of the world's major cities, Melbourne city and Victoria's regional attractions are a key destination for international visitors. Helicopter connections between the airport, central city Melbourne, and regional destinations are a critical component of delivering world class tourism and business facilities. These connections are particularly essential for servicing Victoria's visitors who may have limited time to visit Victoria's key destinations.

The success of Microflite's operations critically relies on its network of strategically located helipads across Victoria. Importantly, this network includes Microflite's central city helipad and associated office which is situated on the River Yarra at Batman Park.

Most large cities in the world facilitate helicopter transport with a purpose built heliport facility (eg the facilities in London and New York). Now is the time to plan for the future.

The provision of strategically located heliports should be a key consideration in any future discussion about the Yarra River and infrastructure provision to service Melbourne's needs.

It is of course important to ensure that the benefits that helicopters bring to the Melbourne are not overshadowed by residential amenity impacts and impacts on river users. Microflite has voluntarily signed up to a Fly Neighbourly agreement with the City of Melbourne to ensure impacts are minimised.

My client seeks that Melbourne Water include the Yarra River helipad in the Yarra River plan to ensure that its importance to Melbourne is recognised and supported.

There are no other options available in the central city to replace the Yarra River helipad so it is vitally important that this piece of aviation infrastructure gets recognised in the Yarra Plan.

My clients would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss.

Clem Newton-Brown

Director

Whitemark Property and Planning.

Appendix A

About Microflite

- As Victoria's largest tourism helicopter service in Victoria, the sole operator of the airport shuttle service between Melbourne Airport and the CBD, and a very busy charter service for private, corporation and government clients, it is essential that Microflite is able to continue to operate from a central location. The River Yarra provides the safest flight path for this purpose.
- Microflite makes a significant contribution to the Victorian community through its participation in para-public activities. This includes a Westpac Life Saver Rescue helicopter that patrols Victoria's beaches every summer on behalf of Life Saving Victoria. This helicopter is operated by Microflite which has the contract with Life Saving Victoria for the provision of services on an on-going basis. Further, through collaboratively working with Life Saving Victoria,

Microflite assists Life Saving Victoria in fund raising and publicity events to support this critical community service.

- Microflite also provides 14 fire fighting helicopters operating in Victoria, ACT and New South Wales, including five of the ten Victorian contracted fire-fighting Firebird helicopters for DELWP and operates the only designated Emergency Management Victoria aerial intelligence gathering helicopter in the State. The fire-fighting helicopters are critical to protecting lives and property around Victoria from bushfire and Microflite played a significant role in the unprecedented 2019/2020 fire season across three states. A centrally located helipad provides critical central access for Ministers of State and their agencies including DELWP, Victoria Police, and the CFA to rapidly respond to incidents.
- In recognition of Microflite's extensive Search and Rescue experience, CASA has granted Microflite the rare permission to operate to 200nm from the coast of Australia (most operators are limited to 12 nm). This permission allows Microflite to provide AMSA and other emergency services with a greater search and rescue capability than other local helicopter operators. Further, AMSA have used Microflite's facilities to co-ordinate response activities and direct search efforts.
- Microflite is undoubtedly Victoria's fastest growing and most successful helicopter company. When purchased by the current owner in 2005, the company operated a single EC120 helicopter. Growth in employment and fleet size began immediately. Microflite's workforce has expanded from 6 employees in 2010 to its current team of 54 personnel including 24 pilots and 11 engineering staff and 19 administrative, logistics and customer service staff operating a fleet of 19 helicopters.
- The company continues to experience growth, creating jobs and investment in Victoria. Microflite's recent investment into the Victorian tourism and aviation economy includes the purchase of 2 new helicopters, and employment of several additional permanent and contract staff.
- Microflite has one of the largest private fleets of helicopters in Australia. With the most modern helicopters in the nation, the company has an outstanding safety record and prides itself in taking a proactive approach to operating to the world's best standards. Each year, Microflite allocates significant expenditure to ensure its fleet are fitted with the world's best safety equipment. For example, Microflite is currently fitting all tourism helicopters in its fleet with emergency flotation equipment as an added safety measure for operations from CBD helipad. This is an investment of over \$100,000 per helicopter for a further improvement in safety for passengers.
- In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, Microflite's corporate responsibility program has a strong focus on making a positive contribution to the lives of people in need. This includes Microflite's annual donations via

financial contributions and gift certificates to a range of worthy charities including the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation, Epworth Medical Foundation, Leukemia Foundation, and to a wide variety of local grassroots fund-raising events.

- In addition to safety considerations, Microflite is also committed to flying neighbourly particularly in central Melbourne to reduce the impact of aircraft noise on residents living in the city. In this regard, Microflite has voluntarily entered into a Fly Neighbourly Agreement with the City of Melbourne and Parks Victoria for the benefit of local residents.