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Connemara Chamber of Commerce,
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19th May, 2017

Re: **Airstrips and Surrounding Sites Consultation (Cleggan and Inishbofin)**

To Whom It Concerns,

I write regarding the future of airstrips and surrounding sites at Cloon & Laghtanabba near Cleggan and on Inishbofin, Co. Galway. The Connemara Chamber of Commerce is based in Clifden, Connemara, Co. Galway and has a high membership level and offers a very reflective representation of the views of the business community in the Connemara region.

We make the following submissions in regard to the future of both airstrips:

- **Keep the airstrips 'as airstrips' and in public ownership** - given the considerable investment by the State of €9 million, we ask that the airstrips be kept as airstrips and be retained in state ownership with a view to providing an air service at Cleggan and Inishbofin. Installing a major regional coastguard station at this site along with providing commercial flights (or a private aerodrome) represents a much better long term social and financial return on investment to the State but especially the people of the area.
- **Low Cost Air Services from Inverin to Cleggan and Inishbofin** – we believe it would worth considering (on a trial basis) providing some air services from Inverin to Cleggan and Inishbofin to establish what the demand would be and the viability of future services.
- **Coastguard and Rescue Services** – given the remoteness of this region and proximity to the entire west coast of Ireland we see the airstrip at Cleggan as an ideal West Coast Rescue Service Station combining several Rescue services and the Coast Guard. The Inishbofin airstrip could act as a supporting airstrip to Cleggan. The recent tragedy at Blacksod, Co. Mayo shows how these areas need working infrastructure for both day time and night time landings, take-offs and emergency evacuations. We also believe that any future agreement entered into must allow for the continued use of the sites as landing locations for the coastguard and rescue services.



- **Duel Use: delivering both economic and social benefit** As well as the proposed coastguard and Rescue Stations, the airstrips could also be in duel use by allowing private traffic to land and take off.
- **Private Use – Unlicensed Aerodrome** - While the ideal situation would be for the airstrips to be open to commercial operations such as having scheduled flights from Cleggan to Inishbofin, we believe there is no reason why the airstrips cannot be opened up immediately to private use with an unlicensed aerodrome. Thereafter, depending on usage, commercial options could be explored.
- **Increased Tourism & Quality of Life** – active airstrips at Inishbofin and Cleggan (whether private or commercial flights) would bolster tourism numbers from the substantial aviation community (typically high net worth individuals) both in Ireland and overseas to the region. The Aran Islands enjoy a lot of this type of tourism. It would also increase quality of life and ensure connectivity is retained.
- **100 Years of Aviation Heritage** - The area has a great heritage in regards to aviation. June 19th, 2019 marks one hundred years of the first transatlantic flight which took off from St. Johns Newfoundland and landed just under 7 miles south of the current Cleggan airstrip. By opening the airstrips as soon as possible, the upcoming date in 2019 offers an opportunity for the State to see some return on considerable investment.

And finally, ...

- **Alcock & Brown Airport** - we propose that the airstrip at Cleggan be titled the 'Alcock and Brown Airport/Airstrip'.

In summary, Connemara Chamber of Commerce ask that the airstrips be kept in public ownership but opened as soon as possible for the social and economic benefits that need to be seen from the investment.

Yours Sincerely,

Terence O'Toole
President - Connemara Chamber of Commerce