

Printed April 19, 2008 04:59am AEST

Fears grow among light-aircraft pilots

Steve Creedy | *April 18, 2008*

ANGST about safety in the Sydney basin is rising again in the general aviation community as the deadline approaches for closing Hoxton Park airport.

The Phoenix Aero Club, which will be forced to move by the closure, has written to Kevin Rudd and Transport Minister Anthony Albanese asking for an urgent review of the decision.

It is worried that light aircraft will have nowhere to land in the Sydney basin in certain wind conditions.

The airport is being closed, as part of the previous government's airport privatisation policy, to make way for an industrial development.

Bankstown, Mascot and Camden airports will remain.

But general aviation groups have expressed fears about the lack of a north-south runway at any of the airports after Bankstown Airport closed its 18/36 runway.

"The 18/36 runway at Bankstown was short and relatively rarely used, and closing this runway was justifiable given that nearby Hoxton park, with its longer 16/34 runway, was available," Phoenix vice-president Geoffrey Parker said in a letter to the Prime Minister.

"When Hoxton Park closes, there will be no north-south runway accessible to general aviation in the Sydney basin.

"This poses a major safety issue in strong cross-wind situations (such as southerly busters) in that general aviation flights might have nowhere to land."

Mr Parker said pilots had been told they could land at airports outside Sydney, or at Mascot.

But he said this could lead to conflict between light aircraft and incoming international flights at Mascot, and outside airports were unsuitable because of weather problems in typical crosswind situations.

He said that diverting to Mascot was a "highly dangerous situation where distressed pilots, unfamiliar with Kingsford Smith Airport, may put lives in danger in the event of interference with large jet operations".

"We predict that when Hoxton Park closes, a new general aviation facility will be needed in the Sydney basin, for example at Schofields ... or at Fleurs, an abandoned World War II airfield west of Hoxton Park," he said.

"Considering how difficult it is to establish airports, the loss of Hoxton Park Airport to the community is deplorable and extremely short-sighted."