

7 December 2017

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

To the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

I am writing in regard to the operation, regulation and funding of air route service delivery to rural, regional and remote communities, with particular reference to social and economic impacts of air route supply and airfare pricing.

My name is Alisha Kidner. I am 37 years old and I live in Mount Isa, QLD. I don't fly out of Mount Isa regularly because of the expense of the flights.

All flights out of Mount Isa are around 2 hours and travel to Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane, yet it costs around \$800 return for a standard fare, sometimes more. Once we get to those locations, it is a fraction of the cost to travel overseas, so running costs of the aircraft can't be the reason for inflated prices.

Glencore Mount Isa Mines and George Fisher Mine have very few staff that fly in and out of previously mentioned locations, and most roles now being advertised require the successful applicant to relocate to Mount Isa. Ernest Henry Mine in Cloncurry have charter flights for their employees and the minimal overflow travel with commercial airlines, so money grabbing from a mining company can't be the reason either.

The cost of living including rates and electricity is very expensive in Mount Isa that a Mine employees wage is needed just to live here. There isn't a lot left over for holidays and I actually pity families who live here and do not have a family member working in the Mines.

The last time I took a flight to Townsville return was in August for a friend's wedding. I booked ahead of time and it was around \$550 return, a good price compared to the normal \$800, and better than a 10 hour drive each way, just for the weekend on a fairly ordinary road.

The last time I took a flight to Cairns was in July for my sister's baby shower for her first child, a very special event for my family. This was around \$800 return but once again, better than a 14 hour drive each way, just for the weekend on a fairly ordinary road.

I can't tell you the last time I flew to Brisbane, I drove down in September with my step-daughter for a wedding, 21 hours each way as flights would have been around \$1600.

My partner had to go to a funeral in Newcastle in June. We paid around \$700 one way via Brisbane and got his return flight on Qantas Frequent Flyer points because we couldn't afford the return flight at the last minute. The Qantas Compassionate fare was around \$1000 one way and Virgin do not offer Compassionate fares at all. That's a 25 hour drive each way, but most people would do it as there is no other affordable option.

My partner and I went to Bali in the June/July School Holidays, \$1800 return for both of us from Townsville to Denpasar, full fare as it was during School Holidays. It would have cost us another \$1600 return to fly to Townsville. It ends up being a very expensive holiday, so we drove.

Flights generally run between Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane daily, sometimes twice daily. If less services were offered, the planes would be full and prices should be reduced, right? Somehow I don't think so.

Saying this, I'm not accusing the airlines of being the cause of high prices. Maybe the Airport fees are inflated. Why aren't more airlines accessing rural, regional and remote airports to create a bit of competition?

The closest place to see the ocean from Mount Isa is Karumba, a 570km drive. The ocean is what most people miss about living in Mount Isa.

I feel like we're being punished for living here, from all spectrums of business.

I hope my submission sheds some light on what it is like to live in a regional community, and a mining town at that.

Regards

Alisha Kidner