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# Flying thoughts on air freight

:RESH food products with short lifespans, such as chilled lamb and ›eef, have particularly benefited from the growth of passenger raffic linked to the commencement of the Qantas Emirates ›artnership in 2013.

Twenty years ago, back in the days when we used to fly to Europe ia Singapore, Perth airport moved 1.9 million international ›assengers.

This number grew to 4.1m a decade later which dramatically ncreased air freight capacity to the Middle East and Asia.

At the bottom of all those outgoing planes is spare cargo space, what they call belly cargo, which we can fill with rock lobster going o China and chilled lamb and beef going to the Middle East.

Both regions have a solid percentage of high net wealth consumers who will pay an absolute premium for fresh product, ›ut like the market for luxury cars, it is limited in size.

Produce too much rock lobster as we did pre-2008 and you flood he market, and the product ends up frozen in a container wandering the world looking for a home.

Produce too much lamb and it ends up as mutton, hopefully wandering onto a ship to enter the live export trade, but if that rade is not there, it ends up like frozen lobster in a container ooking for a market.

Even when we have our volumes matching the market, we need o have those planes landing daily for if we don't keep up a consistent supply, then our product gets replaced by another ›roducer such as New Zealand or South Africa who can both supply neat and lobster.

The failure to return to pre-COVID levels of international flights ›as impacted our high-end export sectors, hence the recent lecision to stop Qatar Airways doubling its flights is going to hurt ›ur fresh produce export industry.

Any opportunity to increase capacity should be embraced by the :ederal government, particularly when the sale yard of lamb has allen 50pc since this Federal government came to power.

Qatar is the third largest market in the Middle East and North Africa for Australian chilled and frozen boxed beef and sheep meat.

Following the Qantas/Emirates flights into the UAE, Doha, the capital of Qatar, is the next logical airport to see increased flights nto the Middle East.

Which makes the government's mad decision to not approve additional Qatar Airways flights beyond belief particularly for a government that is claiming the live sheep industry can simply ransition from walking on a ship to being loaded into a container as boxed fresh, chilled, or frozen.

Remove the high-value live export market and cap the fresh airfreight market and we are left with the frozen market which pays

Interestingly our biggest imports are pharmaceutical and electronic products – think of all those Amazon and Alibaba purchases that arrive in a week.

But you may ask, what about hiring a dedicated air freighter aircraft?

Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane are currently the only airports in Australia with markets large enough to sustain dedicated international freight services, except for one weekly service to Toowoomba.

This leaves Perth totally reliant on spare belly capacity on international flights.

Currently Perth airport handles about 1000t a week of export airfreight with 80pc of the total fresh produce, but total airfreight movement remains well below pre-pandemic levels.

In 2022 total airfreight volumes were 17pc lower than 2019.

Outbound (exporting) traffic is particularly low – as of March 2023 (latest data release) the 12-month total freight was at the lowest since 2015.

Nationally Sydney handled over half of all of Australia's airfreight, but it is cost prohibitive to tranship from Perth back to Sydney then off to the Middle East, so the focus needs to be on increasing international freight out of Perth.

In 2019, which I'd choose as the most recent 'normal' year, the average inbound Qatar Airways flight to Australia contained 7.32t of freight, and the average outbound flight from Australia contained 12.56t of freight.

These numbers have been consistent over the past decade, so they work as a rough guide to extra freight capacity per flight added.

One interesting little factoid is aircraft type and model really matter.

The single deck 777 in full 300 passenger configuration, can carry 23,000kg, 132m3 of cargo in addition to a full passenger and baggage load, about twice the air cargo as the long-distance version of the double decker A380, also in passenger configuration.

In Perth at the moment, we are served by two nightly A380s (one Emirates and one Qatar Airways) – you know the big double decker planes that were once on their way out as being too big.

If the Middle East, airlines were able to add more flights to Perth, they would likely shift from their A380s to more frequent and lower passenger number 777 flights with a consequence of doubling the airfreight capacity on each and every flight.

But even if, or rather when, the government reverses its decision and allows Qatar Airways to double its current capped 28 direct return flights in and out of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Perth, this would add just an estimated additional 1,103t of outbound capacity per month nationally.

Double the flights to four out of Perth is likely to see them drop down to the single deck 777 which could see airfreight capacity increasing fourfold, but this is only an additional 100t a week.

Problem is this only soaks up 3000 lambs a week, nowhere near enough to save the industry from the looming disaster of shutting off the live export trade which is the ultimate fall-back option when we can't move our lambs through the system.

If the government is banking on boxed sheep meat replacing live exports, then it's decision on Qatar Airways is a step backwards.

But even when they reverse it, the additional air freight isn't going to make the slightest difference to the price of sheep in the sale yards, not that the animal activists or the Labor Party give a rat.

# Government thinks gravel pits are super pits

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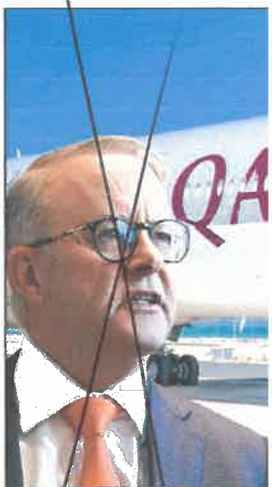
# Would Labo Kingdom li the Middle





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