

The Parish of the Furneaux Islands
Diocese of Tasmania

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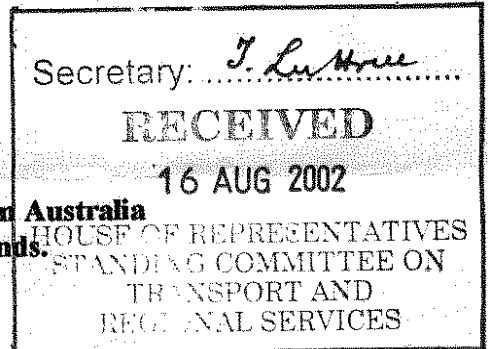
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15th August 2002

SUBMISSION.

**Inquiry into commercial regional aviation services in Australia
 and transport links to major populated islands.**



To the House of Representatives Standing Committee,

As you can see from the above address we live on an island. I have worked in a good number of isolated places and outback Australia, but I can truthfully say I have never worked in a place quite like this. In some ways it is no where as remote, but it has this unique problem, where you can't just jump in the car or a coach and get to where it is you want to go. In that respect we are almost totally reliant on air services and their timetable.

For getting on and off the island we have three options: Sea travel mostly once a week.
 An RPT air service.
 Charter aircraft.

The first option is a real challenge if you are not a sailor and is slow making it almost unusable for the day to day things. Coupled with this, is that the boat carries only a few passengers and is not really fitted out for them.

Charter travel is an option but is very expensive unless a group can get together, so it is for produce or special events. We, personally, have used it in medical emergencies when an RPT flight was unavailable for several days, but then only as a last resort. We have also been called upon to loan money to people who have to be with a medical evacuee. The patient has been flown out by Flying Doctor but there was not enough room on that plane for the escort, so a charter flight was the only option and then only in daylight hours.

That leaves the RPT service. Currently we have one airline using Piper Chieftain Aircraft. The services that they provide are good, but with some exceptions:

The amount and size of luggage that the Chieftain can carry is a real problem and usually there is very little room for any sort of cargo.

Of recent times, since we have gone back to the one airline, it is quite difficult to get seats. Because there is only the one, the schedule can be restricting. In my case there are often one day conferences on a Saturday. I can fly out on the Friday pm or Saturday morning. I cannot return before Sunday evening or Monday. Because of this I cannot attend these professional development courses because of my work commitments on the Sunday. Other than this personal effect the schedule is fairly good.

Timetabling can be a problem as there are only a few flights and as airports generally are a fair distance from main centres we tend to spend reasonable amounts of time in the terminal waiting.

To my knowledge there is no slotting as our RPT uses a totally different terminal building.

Link ups with other flights can be a problem because of timing and distance from one terminal to another.

Both the Launceston and Melbourne terminals are removed from main ones. In Launceston it is about a kilometre away and there is no provision for walking and taxis are not always available. Mostly we depend on the good graces of other passengers who are being met. In Melbourne we have actually been abused by taxi drivers who have waited in the queue at Tullamarine and then get just a \$10 fare to Essendon. It is not a satisfactory arrangement. Because of these distances there is no interconnectivity. We know of tourists who have been left waiting in the Launceston main terminal for their flight to here, which of course, never happened. They simply expected that their next flight would leave from that terminal. No one thought to inform them so they missed their flight.

There is no on-carriage, through ticketing or freight handling. All has to be done by the passenger, which is all OK for locals in the know but a real frustration to the novice traveller to this island. As we are actively seeking to further develop the tourist promotion to the island this is a very real problem.

Cost can be a problem. Most locals simply accept that that is what you have to pay to get off the island but for some with ongoing health problems very large bills can be racked up. With the massive delay in the health travel rebate some people have been forced to take out loans while the wheels turn so slowly. There is also a problem for families and school travel when more seats are required than can be supplied.

Regional link ups can be a problem. King can only be accessed from here by a flight to Launceston, then car travel to Burnie, a wait, and another flight. It can be a very frustrating adventure. Because, where ever we go from this island wheels are required at the other end, we become expert but it can lead to frustrations and long delays especially for visitors.

Landing strips are also a problem here. There is an East/West sealed strip which is short. There is also a North/South gravel strip that is much longer but unable to carry larger aircraft, particularly when it is wet. Research was carried out when there was another long grass strip which lay more or less along the prevailing wind direction and over 80% of the landings then were on that strip. There have been promises over the years and pressure that the present long strip be surfaced but in reality I feel it would be better to leave that one and build an entirely new strip suitable for larger aircraft. This would be taking a visionary approach to the potential of this island and its needs.

Support is needed from all levels of Government – Federal needs to allow local Government the room to move to establish vision – they are the ones who mostly know the real situation. The State needs to establish and care for infrastructure, links and usability at airports. Realistically the Federal Government

has to be involved to establish large capital expenditure such as a new strip, where the State Government can put money in place to improve usability. Others have transport subsidised and I can see no reason why it should not be the same here especially as there are no alternatives now or in the foreseeable future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Witten', with a flourish at the end.

Rev. Bob Witten.