

Secretary: *J. Lunn*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORT AND
REGIONAL SERVICES

SUBMISSION NO. 66

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Transport and Regional Services;
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT, 2600.

Dear Committee Members,

Thankyou for the opportunity to make comment re the "Inquiry into Commercial Regional Aviation Services in Australia and Transport Links to Major Populated Islands".

I moved to Flinders Island (eastern Bass Strait) approx 4years ago with the desire to open and operate a B&B tourist operation. Because of the reduction in air services to Flinders Island since that time and the ongoing related problems experienced by several airline operators I have put my business plans "on hold" indefinitely pending improvements to the transport services which would enable a tourism related business on Flinders Island to be a viable business .

Since 1985 I have travelled extensively through-out the world and have experienced , at first hand, airline and sea transport at all levels in first world and third world countries. These numerous experiences lead me to believe that transport services involving Flinders Island are less than satisfactory and are having a negative affect on the local community in a significant number of ways.

These problems are not caused by any one business or level of government but it seems that a co-ordinated long-term commitment by all levels of government would go a long way to resolving the relevant issues that would enable transport services to and from Flinders Island to be viable and sustainable.

I hope the following comments are taken in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

- Many of the transport issues relating to Flinders Island seem relatively easy to resolve but unfortunately the situation is complicated by the " chicken and egg" scenario ! . An example of this is that many more tourists would come to Flinders Island if the planes were bigger (ie perception of safety/comfort compromises etc), but without this increase in customers airline operators claim that they couldn't afford to provide larger planes. Larger planes would lead to more airline customers; more tourists would lead to more local jobs, more local jobs would mean that the island's young people wouldn't have to leave to find employment in intrastate/ interstate regions; more jobs lead to more money being spent locally and more or increased services coming to the island's community etc etc etc
- Flinders Council needs financial assistance to develop and seal the existing north/south runway. This would eliminate a major reason that larger airlines continually use not to provide services to Flinders Island.
- Local, State and Federal governments need to agree on which level of Government is responsible for what(ie a local scenario may be that Flinders Council is responsible for maintaining the airport, the State government funds upgrading of runways and Federal government provides subsidies which would provide affordability for all residents and more suitable aircraft), this would put an end to the " buck passing " that presently occurs.
- Aircraft currently used are more often than not totally inadequate for the role which they provide.
Aircraft servicing Flinders Island need to be large enough and flexible enough to provide for a mix of passengers(residents, tourists and business) Luggage (residents, tourists) and Freight.
- At the present time it is not unusual for passengers to have to leave their luggage behind for another flight and this can take several days to be forwarded on by the airline, this does not impress tourists or residents as it often results in essential items ie baby strollers , sporting equipment etc etc being left behind.
- Availability of plane seats is barely sufficient enough for residents needs, ie recently I needed to attend a funeral of a close relative in N.S.W. This was naturally not something that was anticipated so airline bookings had to be made at short notice. I was able to get airline seats from Melbourne to

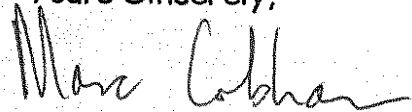
Sydney (and return) and back to Flinders Island but was not able to get a seat from Flinders Island to Melbourne or Flinders Island to Launceston . The unfortunate result being that I was unable to attend the funeral, which was very distressing for myself and other family members in N.S.W. (I do appreciate that living in a remote and isolated region means that compromises have to be made, however availability of airline seats has deteriorated markedly in the time that I have lived on Flinders Island ie 4 years).

- It would be great if the local operator and /or future airline operators could be linked in with one of the larger airlines. This would allow bookings around the world, availability of " frequent flyer reward schemes" etc etc, and prevent potential tourists giving up on visiting our beautiful region because they are unable to find out how to get here ! It would also provide a sense of stability re airline operator viability.
- A direct air link to Tullamarine Airport (Melbourne) would provide easy access to interstate and international flights for both residents and tourists and eliminate the need to get Taxis between Essendon Airport and Tullamarine or the need to get a Taxi into Melbourne (\$35 +) plus overnight accommodation ,then a taxi or bus back to Tullamarine the following day to access the next flight (all very time consuming and expensive but unfortunately necessary due to the frequency of delays experienced when utilizing the services of the current RPT operator).
- If a direct air link is not viable then perhaps the operator could provide a shuttle bus between the airports (this would also enhance the tourists experience when accessing Flinders Island air services).
- It is often disconcerting for passengers utilizing the current RPT service to travel in elderly aircraft where internal fittings/ trim etc are inoperative or loose etc this raises questions re maintenance/ servicing etc and would only add to the perceived fears of passengers who dislike flying in small aircraft.
- Whilst a fantastic initiative for Tasmania, the commitment of nearly \$300 million for the provision of two world class passenger/vehicular ferries to the Melbourne-Devonport service and the fact that passengers can take their vehicles for free is "cold comfort" to the residents of Flinders Island.

- To take our vehicles to Tasmania (ie intrastate) costs in excess of \$500-oneway. This is beyond the means of most islanders so those who can afford to travel " off island" have to hire vehicles to travel in their own state !.
- A scheme similar to the Bass Strait Equalization Scheme should apply to residents so they can access both intrastate and interstate for both sea and air travel.
- The existing transport via sea is satisfactory for freight between Tasmania and Flinders Island ie weekly service. Irregular access via sea is available between Flinders Island and Port Welshpool in Victoria subject to a full load. This is therefore unreliable and a logistical nightmare to arrange either freight or passage. The boat run by Southern Shipping is unfortunately not designed for passengers comfort and considerable sea journeys can result if the weather is bad, (fuel supply pick-ups in Northern Tasmania can result in passengers being on the boat for 24 hours !).
- More reliance on the sea and more appropriate boats could resolve many of the transport problems currently experienced by Flinders Island residents and visitors .

I hope my comments are of benefit to your enquiry and I look forward to reading the results of your findings.

Yours Sincerely,



Marc Cobham

21st August, 2002.