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SUBMISSION NO. 128

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02 67 791343SUBMISSION TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT & REGIONAL SERVICESINQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES

This brief submission to the above Inquiry is made by Mr Robert Gordon of "Earlstoun", Guyra NSW. The author currently holds no community or industry, or political representative positions, but has held a significant number in the past. He believes the views expressed are supported by the vast majority of country Australians who require, and deserve, access to safe, affordable, high quality air services.

The author has no technical or aviation infrastructure knowledge or expertise. The views expressed are made from the perspective of the rural passenger dependant on rural air services for business, medical and social purposes.

This submission addresses only two of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.
* THE ADEQUACY OF COMMERCIAL AIR SERVICES IN REGIONAL & RURAL AUSTRALIA

The Committee should understand, and acknowledge that Australian country air services are an Essential Service, not some discretionary service which some communities should do without, or have to pay exorbitant fees to utilize.

With the Essential Service classification comes the responsibility to provide approx. parity of quality and cost to all Australians no matter where they live.

The benchmark in all the Committee's deliberations must be the comparison of the quality and affordability of country air services with those available to urban dwellers. On this basis the current inadequacy of rural air services is nothing short of appalling.

* THE ROLE OF ALL THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING & ASSISTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL AIR SERVICES.

All three levels of government have a clear responsibility to play an on-going role in providing this Essential Service to country Australia.

Federal and State Governments must do more than just provide 'start up' or development assistance. Financial, and other assistance and a degree of regulation are required for the provision of all essential services to regional and rural areas. Anything less is an abrogation by Government of its moral and constitutional responsibilities. Without Government intervention the current market failure of country air services will continue and rural dwellers will be further disadvantaged.

Federal and State Governments must subsidize the direct costs of country air lines if they are to be financially viable. At present they are disadvantaged by higher fuel costs than national carriers enjoy. Landing charges is another issue which needs to be addressed.

Local Government must not be required to provide subsidies, without compensation from State or Federal Government(s), as the financial burden would then fall on the already disadvantaged rural sector. This would only exacerbate the existing country/city disparity of quality and affordability of air services.

CONCLUSION

The essential starting point for any inquiry into future regional and rural air services must be to declare these services to be essential to the ability of country Australia to compete, financially and socially with the urban community.

If this declaration is forthcoming it then follows that the inquiry must recommend policies which will deliver approximate parity of air services' quality and affordability with those enjoyed by urban Australia.
Robert J. Gordon *RJ Gordon* 30-8-02