

Secretary: *J. Lu Hall*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORT AND
REGIONAL SERVICES



SUBMISSION

To House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services from Champions of the Bush

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

Champions is a group of businesses and organisations that operate proudly in regional Australia and who are committed to regional development. The objectives of the organisation are:

- To instil pride in regional Australia
- To elevate and stimulate policy debate on regional issues
- To improve the financial and human capital of regional Australia
- To influence government policies that effect regional Australia
- To improve communications among member companies and organisations
- To promote economic growth in country Australia.

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Regional Air Services.

It is the view of Champions that regional air services are inadequate. We believe it's in the national interest to have a strong air transport system linking rural and regional areas to the capital cities and to each other.

There is a role for government, as part of its national building mandate, to assist the development and maintenance of regional air services.

There is no question that services have diminished since the collapse of Ansett. While Kendell and Hazelton (now Regional Express) have kept flying, it has been at a much diminished rate.

The other diminution in services has occurred with the rapid demise of small feeder airlines over the last few years.

Economic growth in regional Australia depends very much on a strong transport system to overcome the tyranny of distance. Aviation has a critical role to play in "bridging the gap" between city and country, and between regions.

Champions believe the government should encourage and assist the development of regional hub services. These services appear to be the ones which have suffered most, and people are now being forced to drive long distances to regional centres like Dubbo and Tamworth.

Small scale owner/operator services require encouragement and support because it is clear that the larger airlines can't possibly provide flights on these narrow routes. Their equipment and the scale of their operations are too large, and the passenger demand is more limited.

Champions believe that Sydney Airport should be retained for regional air services. The proposal that they should be shifted to Bansktown is impractical. Many regional people make connecting flights from Sydney to other regions, interstate or overseas.

We also support retaining Essendon Airport in Melbourne for aviation. Its proximity to Tullamarine and the city makes it an important base for regional pilots, country business people, and emergency services. Essendon's retention for aviation maintains an important transport link between country Victoria and Melbourne that cannot be replaced.

Champions believe all three levels of government have a role to play in assisting the development of regional air services.

The Federal Government's former Local Ownership Program is a positive example of the Commonwealth supporting the development of airport infrastructure in partnership with local government.

The commercial reality is that low level regional air services can only operate efficiently with some form of government financial support. We encourage this inquiry to recommend that such support is essential, and to consider options of making it available to regions on a fair and equitable basis.

Ways to reduce the cost of using regional air services should also be considered. There is little discounting on regional routes, and generally speaking it's more expensive to travel from Albury to Sydney than it is to fly from Sydney to Adelaide, for example.

In conclusion, a country as vast as Australia needs affordable and accessible aviation services to maintain communications and to encourage decentralisation. Champions of the Bush believe there is a role for the Federal Government in developing airport infrastructure and in supporting the operation of viable air services in regional Australia.

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