

STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES
INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA
SUBMISSION INTO INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL REGIONAL AVIATION
SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA ETC.

This submission deals with W.A. and the Kimberley area in particular.

The adequacy of commercial air services in regional and rural Australia.

At the moment the services into and out of Kununurra to either Perth or Darwin are severely restricted and not meeting all the current needs. The Brasilia used by Air North is able to carry most of the passengers for most of the year, but does not allow for the tourist season at all, nor does it encourage tourist travel. The size of the aircraft limits the number of discount seats available severely, leaving most of the travel at expensive rates, consequently a lot of people drive to either Darwin or Broome and catch the plane from there, or don't travel at all by air. There is no room for a reasonable amount of luggage, - 13 kg. is not realistic for people traveling from up here away on holidays, or vice versa, very little if any freight is carried, livestock is not carried unaccompanied, stretchers are not able to be used and coffins are not able to be carried. This has left travelers in the far north at a severe disadvantage, medical transfers are impossible, deceased people have to be carried on expensive charter aircraft, people are unable to get their freight in a timely manner, and for people in Wyndham newspapers are a **once a week occurrence only**. This puts a lot of people at disadvantage when trying to keep abreast of Govt. tenders etc, to say nothing of the ability to keep in touch with the rest of the news in Australia. The local bird breeder has been almost put out of business, as without the ability to ship his birds to other places in Australia, he has no business, and people are unable to have pets sent up etc. etc. There needs to be support for the re-regulation of the intrastate air routes by the State Govt. with some control over prices, using the Legislative power which they already hold but have not used for some time. If an airline is making a good profit on some routes, then they will be prepared to carry the "thin routes", if they hold a protected route licence, however no operator is going to have to compete on good routes, make not much profit and then lose again on routes that are not always profitable. De-regulation of the aviation industry might have been good for the golden triangle in the East, but it has destroyed air travel in the West and north.

It is not necessary to have jet aircraft, but it is necessary to have aircraft that can carry passengers, alive and dead, reasonable amounts of luggage, animals, freight and newspapers, plus encourage air travel for both locals and tourists by having enough discount seating available. People in the cities have access to all of those aspects of air travel, why should those in remote areas be denied those services, particularly when we often don't have any option as to how we travel. Over East the distances are nothing compared to those in the West, plus there are often train or bus services as an option.

Policies and measures required to assist in the development of regional air services.

- a. Regional hub services: There is nothing wrong with "hubbing", provided that the connecting airlines have "through" services for ticketing, baggage and freight, at least for the major routes. In W.A. it may be very practical to hub out of a larger centre, such as Broome, at least until other routes become in higher demand. The main aspect is to be aware of changing needs and respond to them.

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- b. Small scale services: The biggest impediment to these services is the unreasonable and unsubstantiated requirement of CASA. They are unbelievably slow at providing the services they should provide, seem to be totally against any RPT by General Aviation and do everything to hinder any development in rural areas. Australia would be better served by following the USA regulations, where aviation is a growing area that provides the services for the people as they need them, rather than trying to emulate Europe which has very little General Aviation and has no comparison with Australia in regards to air travel. New Zealand is responding to aviation needs, but Australia is lagging badly behind. If they are properly operated, small scale service can provide a necessary and successful service, as was shown for many years until the last three or four years, when CASA has done its best to destroy that section of aviation.
- c. Deployment of suitable aircraft. Again the biggest impediment is lack of protection over “thin” routes, plus the total inflexibility and immobility of CASA. It is ridiculous to expect that a type of aircraft takes twelve months to get onto an AOC, leaving the airline totally unable to respond to market needs. Again it is the restrictive, unrealistic and obstructive nature of CASA that is the biggest hurdle for any airline, big or small, to overcome.

An important point to remember is that most people prefer a smaller aircraft on a more frequent basis, rather than a large aircraft with an infrequent service; the better the timetabling and frequency of service, the more likely it is that people will use that service.

Interconnectivity.

In the West and the Kimberley the biggest problem is lack of passenger numbers, so any services provided have to be either inadequate, as at the moment, or encouraged by the airline having “protected “ routes, in return for providing a service. It is not helpful to places like Exmouth and Derby , to name only two, for people to have to go to Perth before going up to Exmouth, or for Derby passengers only being able to fly into and out of Broome. Some of the “old routes” may have been slightly long, but at least they met the needs of the travelers. E.g. Perth to Broome on a 737, then Broome – Derby-Kununurra-Darwin on a Dash 8, with the flight returning on the same day.

Times of flights should be responsive to the market, most people in the West like to fly north in the morning and south at night, it fits in with work patterns both in Perth and in the north. If the timetabling is not done to meet the major needs, then again people will not use the air travel. Eg Derby only has one service a day from Broome, so anyone wanting to go to Derby for the day, do their work and return home at night cant, hence the traveler either doesn’t go to Derby, or drives from Broome. This does nothing to encourage air travel.

Role of three levels of Government.

Other than providing helpful advice Local Govt should not be expected to underwrite or meet any costs of aviation. The Federal Govt walked away from its responsibilities in regards to aerodromes many years ago, and is still doing so. Local Govt is in no position to “carry the can” in most cases and where there is a genuine need and not enough finance to meet that need, then the Federal Govt should assist in providing the aerodrome

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that is needed to allow a service to be met. Federal Govt plays a major role in Aviation, as they are supposed to oversee CASA, that responsibility has also been let slide with CASA being totally unanswerable to anybody and totally unresponsive to the industry, at least that part of the industry that is not the major airline. The State Govt should be encouraged to use its powers in regards to licensing routes and airfare control, where it is plainly obvious that de-regulation is not enhancing any services. In W.A. probably only Kalgoorlie and Broome are two destinations that can withstand competition, without then affecting thinner routes elsewhere.

Role of major air transport carriers.

The major airlines have a responsibility to respond to local needs, eg. Timetabling, being aware of school holidays and the needs of traveling school children, pensioner and seniors travel needs and the realisation that for rural areas the aircraft don't just carry live healthy passengers. Regular reliable freight is vital to northern businesses, newspapers should not be a luxury, medical transfers are a constant requirement, not something unusual and airfreighting coffins should not be a luxury for the rich or the coroner. The major carriers should have an agent or representative in each town to provide ticketing and information services for the public, not everyone is on the web or has access to the web, nor do they all have credit cards. Any major airline that is prepared to cross-subsidise its routes, in order to provide a necessary service, should be supported by the relevant Govt. Department, not subjected to endless competition which has been shown to destroy the ability to service the long thin routes in W.A.

Conversely, a major airline should not be allowed to "pick the eyes" out of the routes in W.A., and access to major routes should carry a responsibility to service thinner routes with suitable aircraft and air services.

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