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Secretary: *J. Luffhull*

RECEIVED

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 STANDING COMMITTEE ON
 TRANSPORT AND
 REGIONAL SERVICES

To the INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA AND TRANSPORT LINKS TO MAJOR POPULATED ISLANDS.

Dear committee members, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. I am the proprietor of The Flinders Island Cabin Park and rely heavily on tourism for my livelihood. Business has declined markedly since the demise of Airlines of Tasmania. All my following points relate to Flinders Island only, not regional Australia as a whole.

1. **Adequacy of commercial air services in regional and rural Australia.**
 We suffer from a chronic shortage of seats even in winter. The frequency of flights is good but the planes are often full. This indicates the need for larger planes. The R.P.T. operator would argue that it can't afford larger planes because profitability is being reduced by the large number of charter operators in its market place. I contend the RPT operator has created the opportunity for the charter operators by providing a sub standard service over a long period of time.
2. **Policies and measures required to assist in the development of regional air services, including:**
 - a. **Regional hub services;**
 Our major hubs are Launceston and Melbourne and both are good if that is a passenger's final destination. However if someone needs to catch a connecting flight in Melbourne there is a problem getting from Essendon to Tullamarine.
 - b. **Small scale owner operator services;**
 A small-scale operator would benefit from being linked to a larger airline's booking system if at all possible.
 - c. **The deployment of most suitable aircraft types.**
 The 9-seater Navaho aircraft that Island Airlines use have been flying here since 1975. They are nearing their use by date and as mentioned in point one they are too small anyway.
3. **The adequacy of commercial air services to major populated islands and the adequacy of alternative sea services.**
 Air travel is the only viable way to get people to and from the island comfortably. It is true the vessel "Mathew Flinders" can take passengers. However the trip is long (about 8 hours) and the facilities primitive. The boat uses Bridport as its port which is not a central hub for tourists. It provides a good freight service but should not be regarded as an alternate passenger service.

4. **Interconnectivity between regional air transport systems, major national air services and international services (including on-carriage, through ticketing, freight handling, timetabling and airport slotting).**
We have none of the above and normally need to stay overnight in Launceston or Melbourne.
5. **The role of all three levels of Government in supporting and assisting the development of regional air services and island transport systems.**
The airport is owned by the municipal council who maintain it with rates revenue and landing fees. The council does not seem to have enough funds for major capital expenditure.
The State Government has bought with taxpayer money, the two new ferries. Flinders Island will not benefit from the business they will create.
The federal Government builds and improves roads all over Australia and puts up signs to advertise the fact. Flinders Island cannot be accessed by road **THE AIRPORT RUNWAY IS OUR ROAD**. I believe the long runway should be sealed (or another runway built) using state or federal money. This would go a long way to addressing the problems raised in point 1. and 2.c. ie. the provision of greater capacity by encouraging the use of larger planes. The sealing of the runway would make the run more attractive to larger operators with larger aircraft. Larger turbo prop aircraft have faster landing speeds and higher tyre pressures. Because of this they apparently do more damage to gravel surfaces. Also I am told loose gravel can damage turbine engines.
6. **The role of major air transport carriers in providing regional services.**
The regional airlines need to network with the majors where possible and utilise their booking services.

In conclusion I believe the single biggest issue is to find a way to encourage an efficient, profitable and safe airline to service Flinders Island with larger more reliable and more modern aircraft. The main thing holding back progress in this direction is the unsuitability of the gravel runway to modern turbo prop aircraft.

If Flinders Island is to participate at all in the Australian tourism market we need to remove the bottleneck created by the lack of airline capacity. Tourism operators here are often offered the opportunity to advertise their services in magazines or on television but they don't take up the offer because they know the airline isn't physically able to get the extra people here. I believe the crux of the problem is the fact that the runway is not sealed.

I hope the committee can visit Flinders Island so these matters can be discussed in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Gerard L. Walker.