

Secretary: *J. L. ...***RECEIVED****26 AUG 2002**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORT AND
REGIONAL SERVICES5 Alverna Grove,
Brighton, 3186

20 August 2002

The Committee Secretary,
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services,
Parliament House,
Canberra, 2600,
A.C.T.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to draw your attention to the dramatic deterioration in air and shipping services to Flinders Island in Bass Strait. I have been visiting the island regularly since the mid 70s and have had a property there since 1986. When I first started visiting the island, there was a regular air service to the island provided by Ansett using Fokker Friendships, plus a couple of minor and charter operators using light aircraft. There were also at that time 3 ketches running regularly to the island from Welshpool in Victoria and Launceston in Tasmania.

In the intervening years we have seen all these services diminish. Ansett withdrew from the run, and to my knowledge, at least seven minor airlines servicing the route have gone to the wall. At the same time, the Flinders Island Shipping Company, owned by local residents has had to sell the ketches and go into voluntary liquidation.

At the present time, there is only one airline – Island Airlines Tasmania – operating light aircraft on a semi-regular basis from Launceston and Essendon, plus a couple of charter operators, flying out of Moorabbin and Yarram. The shipping situation is even worse. With all the ketches gone, there is only one vessel, the Matthew Flinders, running a weekly service between Bridport in Tasmania and Lady Barron on Flinders Island. Occasionally, it also comes to Welshpool in Victoria, but these visits are very infrequent, and they do not always return direct to Flinders, so shipping heavy articles such as vehicles, building materials, furniture and so on, is very difficult and time-consuming for Victorian property owners.

The lack of transport services has had a dramatic effect on the island economy. Farms have had to be sold, businesses closed, and the population has gradually dwindled from about 1000 permanent residents in the 70s to about 700 today. Many of the properties sold by permanent residents have been bought by Victorians like myself, so to keep the economy alive, transport needs to be upgraded, not only to Tasmania, but also to Victoria. An improvement in transport services will also give a much-needed boost to tourism – this beautiful island has so much to offer – but if tourists can't get there, even this life-line is denied to the island economy.

From the Victorian perspective, I would see the most urgent needs as being for a regular daily air service to the island from Moorabbin, to supplement and provide competition for the service operating out of Essendon, and a weekly shipping service catering for goods and passengers, preferably based at Hastings rather than Welshpool. Perhaps one of the Tasmanian-owned Incat fast ferries could be

purchased by the Government, and subsidized in operation to ensure continuing viability. (This would also help the company, which is one of the major employers in Hobart).

Some years ago, the noted maritime historian, Charles Bateson, wrote a history of Bass Strait which he called "Dire Strait" in reference to its turbulent past. Flinders Island, the largest of the Bass Strait islands, is now in truly dire straits, and only government intervention will enable it to survive.

We look to your committee to consider these problems and hopefully come up with some solutions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Cohen". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

(Mrs) Barbara Cohen