

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the determinants of regional airfares, based on my experience living in Nhulunbuy, in Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

Nhulunbuy is serviced by a single airline Airnorth, on routes to Darwin and Cairns, both of which are extremely expensive despite being relatively short flights. It is not uncommon to pay upwards of \$1,000 for a one-way flight to Darwin, a journey of approximately 1.5 hours, or similarly high prices to Cairns. Recently, I have paid an additional \$940 simply to change travel dates for a flight from Nhulunbuy to Cairns. These costs are excessive and disproportionate, particularly given that flights are very often half empty from my observations.

The lack of competition on these routes has led to high prices, poor customer service, and inflexible conditions. In my experience, the airline is unresponsive and dismissive. I have repeatedly contacted them to request assistance or subsidised fares and have received no reply in several cases, including:

- requests for subsidised flights for a school camp
- a request for bereavement fares following the unexpected death of a family member
- an application for subsidised flights for a local band to attend a festival.

My husband is part of a new band made up primarily of Yolŋu (Indigenous) men. When the band was invited to perform at a festival in Darwin, we applied to the airline for subsidised or community support fares and received no response. When flights had to be booked urgently, non-Indigenous band members were able to access "local fares" (discounted fare), while the Indigenous band members could not. This was due to barriers such as proof-of-address requirements, identification issues, etc. As a result, we paid up to \$2,000 per person for return flights for the Yolngu bandmates.

The airline promotes itself as supporting local communities, yet my experience suggests that existing fare structures and administrative requirements actively disadvantage Indigenous people and remote residents.

For communities like Nhulunbuy, air travel is not optional. It is essential for education, healthcare, family, cultural participation, and employment. When a single airline controls access to these services, charges extreme prices, and provides poor service without accountability, the result is financial stress, exclusion, and increased isolation.

I urge the Commission to closely examine the effects of monopoly routes, pricing practices on essential regional services, and the equity impacts on remote and Indigenous communities. Stronger oversight, improved competition, and fairer access to subsidised fares are urgently needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,
Nhulunbuy resident , NT