

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Regional Airfares

Introduction and context

I am based in Venus Bay, South Australia, approximately 700 kilometres west of my closest metropolitan airport, Adelaide. My nearest regional airport is Port Lincoln, which I rely on for interstate travel related to my professional work. I travel approximately every two weeks.

For people living in communities like Venus Bay, air travel is not discretionary. It is how we access work, national meetings, governance responsibilities, and essential services. When regional air travel is priced as a premium product, it directly limits the extent to which regional Australians can participate in national economic and civic life.

Evidence of pricing impact

In January, travelling for work, I paid \$454 one way for the Port Lincoln to Adelaide leg alone. This did not include the onward flight to Canberra.

That price was not unusual. It reflects what regional travellers regularly face during periods when travel is driven by work and service needs rather than leisure. Because I travel fortnightly, these costs build quickly. Over time, they act as a real constraint on participation rather than a one-off inconvenience.

For those of us living hundreds of kilometres from metropolitan centres, there are no realistic alternatives. Driving to Adelaide is time-consuming and often impractical when work requires timely, in-person attendance.

Regional air travel as a premium product

Current pricing treats essential regional air travel as a premium product. That framing does not align with the reality of regional life.

From Venus Bay, air travel is not about comfort or choice. It is about access. Digital participation helps in some situations, but it does not replace physical presence for many professional, governance, and service-related responsibilities.

When essential access is priced as a premium, the effect is predictable. Fewer trips, reduced regional representation, and a quieter withdrawal of regional voices from national forums.

Policy proposal

Australians living more than 400 kilometres from a metropolitan airport should be eligible for an uncapped, year-round airfare discount, subsidised by government.

For such a scheme to be meaningful, it cannot be limited to a small number of discounted seats per flight or exclude peak periods. Those limits simply preserve scarcity pricing at the times regional residents most need to travel.

Eligibility should be based on distance from a metropolitan airport and apply to essential travel, including work, governance, health, education, and access to services.

Productivity implications

High regional airfares do not just affect individuals. They affect workforce mobility, leadership participation, and economic contribution.

When regional professionals travel less because of cost, the loss is felt nationally. Skills are underutilised, governance diversity is reduced, and productivity suffers. Treating essential regional air travel as a premium product carries a real economic cost beyond the individual traveller.

Conclusion

Paying \$454 one way for a short regional flight from Port Lincoln to Adelaide highlights a broader issue. For people living in places like Venus Bay, essential access is being priced as a luxury.

An uncapped, government-subsidised airfare scheme for Australians living more than 400 kilometres from a metropolitan airport would be a practical and proportionate way to restore access, support workforce participation, and strengthen national productivity.