

Draft Submission: Impacts of Regional Airfares and Transport Limitations on Clermont Residents

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To: Productivity Commission – Inquiry into the Determinants of Regional Airfares

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1. Introduction

We, the residents of Clermont in Central Queensland, appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the national inquiry into regional airfares. Clermont is a small but vital community supporting both the Bowen Basin mining sector and a diverse non-mining population who rely on distant regional centres for essential services.

Residents not working in the mining industry face significant inequality in access to affordable and available air travel, especially for medical and essential services. These challenges are compounded by limited ground transport options, particularly the absence of a public bus service and the dangers associated with regional highways.

2. Essential Travel Needs and Limited Transport Options

Clermont residents must frequently travel to Brisbane for specialist appointments, diagnostic imaging, children's health services, and hospital-based care. Importantly, there are no commercial flights from Clermont, Emerald or Moranbah to Mackay or Rockhampton. The only air travel to these centres is via Queensland Health medivac, available only in medical emergencies. There is no bus service connecting Clermont to Mackay or Rockhampton. This leaves residents entirely dependent on private vehicles or costly air travel.

3. Reliance on Emerald and Moranbah Airports

Clermont residents rely exclusively on Emerald Airport (2-hour drive, limited Brisbane services) and Moranbah Airport (2-hour drive, dominated by FIFO schedules). This results in extreme fare variability, limited availability, and elevated costs for non-mining residents—especially those needing to travel at short notice for medical reasons.

4. FIFO Workforce Demand Severely Limits Community Access

Mining operations dominate passenger demand on the Moranbah–Brisbane route, creating high seat occupancy tied to shift cycles, dynamic fare surges for short-notice bookings, reduced availability for community members, and disproportionately expensive fares for non-mining households.

5. Dangerous Road Travel: Peak Downs Highway and Gregory Highway

Because there are no alternative bus or air routes, residents often travel by road. The Peak Downs Highway is notoriously dangerous for humans, with a death toll in the dozens, and whilst there isn't available statistics for the Gregory highway, the condition of this road isn't any better than the Peak Downs Highway. Such statistics, and our lived experience

highlights extreme traffic risk. Queensland recorded 302 road fatalities in 2024, its highest toll in 15 years, reflecting widespread danger on highways used by Clermont residents.

6. Health, Social, and Economic Impacts

High airfare costs, limited flight availability, lack of public transport, dangerous highways, and long distances to specialist medical care create significant health inequities, disproportionately affecting elderly residents, people with chronic conditions, parents of children needing specialist care, low-income families, and Indigenous residents.

7. Recommendations

- Community fare caps or reserved resident seat allocations.
- Regulated medical travel fares to prevent surge pricing.
- Transparency around FIFO block bookings.
- Incentives for additional carrier capacity.
- Mining industry contributions to community travel equity.
- Consideration of regulated routes with maximum fare caps.

8. Conclusion

Clermont residents face significant barriers accessing essential services due to high regional airfares, limited flight options, lack of public transport, and dangerous highways. These conditions combine to create disproportionate health and economic burdens on non-mining households.