

Productivity Commission Regional Airlines Inquiry

I am an aged pensioner, meeting that stage of life in which I increasingly require access to specialist medical advice and care.

I am also a volunteer at Mildura Base Hospital where I visit long stay or isolated (from family and friends) patients, and have done so since before covid.

I'm also involved with local groups both sporting and creative.

Before my retirement I spent 14 years as a local primary school principal, and was also a director of a local not for profit, and a member and chair the the Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Committee.

Since 1992 I have seen the costs of local servicing by regional airfares impact a wide demographic.

Young Families and children.

Specialist care for children in the Sunraysia when lengthy specialist care was required, meant that the cost of airfares to access appropriate timely care and later parental support often led to families choosing sub- optimal local alternatives. This was particularly evident in low socioeconomic and indigenous families.

Rural Isolated Families and Individuals.

In times when agricultural income was under stress I observed that the participation in educational opportunities, lobbying and Industry groups was adversely impacted by the high cost of efficient and quick air access. I heard that "Time away from family/work/farm and costs were the main causes of a loss of diversity in. local informed voices and leaders, and consequently less productivity.

This adverse outcome of regional airfares' cost remains evident to a lesser extent in better economic times, particularly in indigenous and less well off demographics.

Impacts on Older Regional Demographic.

I frequently experience meeting older persons in both my volunteering and community life, who have ended up experiencing less than ideal health outcomes because, although they have been told of opportunities for assessment and care would be best in either Melbourne or Adelaide; they chose local less appropriate assessment and care, indeed do nothing as it is all too difficult because of the cost of airfares, and the time required and inconvenience of using public transport.

Conclusion

In major urban areas public efficient and timely transport is seen as a right.

If Australia is actually a land of equality, then regional airlines must be considered as an essential tool in providing timely and efficient transport for regional communities, in an affordable manner.

To condemn regional communities to inequality, is not only wrong it's creating an ongoing cost in:

- Loss of productivity by lower ability to access education, lobby for local needs and opportunities, and develop leaders whose voices can be heard.
- Growing dependence on Government assistance through growth of less educated, less productive and less healthy rural communities.

James Wilton