

5 March 2026

Re: Determinants of Regional Airfares – Submission

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Megan McGrath, and I am a resident of Kununurra in Western Australia. I am writing to express my strong support for expanded subsidised airfares and price-capped routes for remote communities, particularly in Northern Australia. Affordable, reliable air travel is not a luxury in places like Kununurra, it is an essential service that directly affects safety, family wellbeing, workforce retention, and community sustainability.

I have lived in Kununurra for six years, having relocated from Melbourne with my family of four. I work as a school psychologist supporting vulnerable Aboriginal youth in a CARE school, and my husband works in the same school as an Engagement Officer. Our work is deeply relational and relies heavily on long-term rapport with Aboriginal families and young people. After establishing ourselves within the community, we made a conscious decision to stay, something not many do in a transient town where staff turnover is constant and agencies struggle to attract and retain suitable employees. Workforce stability is essential to making real progress toward Closing the Gap, yet that stability is undermined when the cost of simply staying connected to family becomes unmanageable.

Like many Kimberley residents, my immediate family lives on the east coast. Travel via Darwin has always been the most practical, affordable, and efficient way to maintain those essential family connections. When Nexus Airlines operated in our region, I could fly to Darwin for around \$199 return, making onward travel feasible and giving me the reassurance that I could get home quickly if needed. This made an enormous difference to my sense of isolation and my ability to support aging parents and grandparents.

However, with Nexus withdrawing and AirNorth once again holding a monopoly over the route, airfares have surged to unaffordable levels. Recently, when my grandmother experienced what was suspected to be a stroke, the cost of returning home to see her exceeded \$3,000 return. I was effectively forced into an impossible choice: attempt the drive through flooded, dangerous wet-season roads, or stay here knowing I might lose the chance to see her. No Australian should be placed in that position purely because a monopoly airline has made remote travel inaccessible.

For communities like ours, reasonably priced flights are vital. They allow residents to fly north to Darwin and south to Perth, reducing the need for long-distance driving. They allow family to visit us, which is especially important in remote towns where the emotional toll of distance is significant. They also assist with retention of essential workers, teachers, nurses, psychologists, social workers, people who are desperately needed but who cannot be expected to remain indefinitely when the cost of visiting loved ones is prohibitive.

While subsidised flights to Perth exist, the cost remains high, commonly \$750 or more per person. For many families, this is still out of reach. Importantly, no such subsidies or capped fares exist for travel to Darwin, despite Darwin being geographically closer and the safest, most logical

route for travel to the east coast. Without this option, residents are pushed toward long-distance road travel that is known to be dangerous. Wet-season flooding regularly cuts off roads entirely, leaving communities isolated for weeks or months at a time.

When roads are open, they are still among the most dangerous in the country. Long stretches without phone reception, high wildlife activity, fatigue risks, and poor wet-season visibility all contribute to significant safety concerns. Every year, residents of northern WA and the NT die on these roads. It is widely acknowledged that rural and remote Australians face disproportionate transport-related risks, yet current airfare pricing actively drives people toward these risky travel options.

Improved access to affordable air travel would substantially reduce these dangers. Introducing capped regional fares to key northern destinations such as Darwin and Broome, alongside more accessible subsidised fares to Perth, would strengthen community safety, reduce isolation, and improve the social and economic wellbeing of remote towns. It would also support workforce retention and help ensure that essential services in remote areas—health, education, mental health support—remain staffed by people committed to staying long term.

I respectfully urge the Government to consider expanding existing airfare subsidy schemes and implementing price-capped fares for critical routes servicing northern WA. For communities like Kununurra, these changes would not simply make travel cheaper—they would help maintain family connections, protect residents from preventable harm, and ensure that choosing to live and work remotely does not mean being cut off from the rest of Australia.

Thank you for considering this submission. I would welcome any further consultation or opportunities to provide additional community insight.

Kind regards,

Megan McGrath

Kununurra, WA