

March 2026

To whom it may concern,

RE: Submission to the Productivity Commission - Inquiry into Regional Airfares

I provide this statement in a personal capacity as a resident of Karratha raising a family of five in the Pilbara. While I represent the local business community professionally, this perspective reflects the practical realities experienced by many regional households.

For families living in remote areas, air travel is not discretionary. It is essential for maintaining connection to services, education opportunities, extended family and broader cultural life. The distance between Karratha and Perth is approximately 1,530 kilometres, and flight time is around two hours. Road travel is not a practical alternative for routine trips.

This is similar to the distance between Melbourne and Brisbane. Searching flights from Melbourne to Brisbane, the cheapest flights ranged between \$165-\$202 each way. For Karratha to Perth the cheapest flights are non-flexible for \$298, or the cheapest flights that can be changed without monetary penalty are \$385 each way.

Karratha is Western Australia's busiest airport outside of Perth, and based on the figures I am presented with at the quarterly Pilbara Regional Flight Committee, I can assure you that the demand for flights is there and many flights are at capacity.

In our household, travel is required for everyday but important needs. For example:

- Orthodontic reviews for our teenage children can require two to three return trips per year where specialist availability is limited locally.
- Additional tutoring opportunities and academic programs often require travel to Perth, particularly during school holiday periods.
- We have no family in the region and rely on flights to connect with family. Noting that normal flight costs make family visiting Karratha prohibitive.
- Accessing cultural experiences such as concerts, theatre performances or major sporting events typically involves purchasing multiple airfares for a family group.
- During extended periods of extreme heat, travel can also provide important relief and contribute to overall wellbeing.

Based on recent travel patterns, a typical capped or available fare can be around \$385 return per person during peak periods. For a family of five, a single trip can therefore cost approximately \$1,900 in airfares alone, before accommodation, ground transport and other expenses are considered.

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Even at lower advertised fares of around \$299 return (and no changes can be made to those flights), the cost for a family group remains approximately \$1,495 per trip. These costs accumulate quickly when essential travel occurs several times per year.

Regional households also face higher underlying living costs. The Pilbara's Regional Price Index is around 115 compared with Perth indexed at 100, indicating that many goods and services are already more expensive. In this context, airfare affordability becomes a significant factor in household decision-making.

In response to rising costs and uncertainty about fare availability, our family will reduce the number of trips we undertake each year. This decision reflects a broader trend observed among regional residents who must balance financial pressures with the need to maintain connection and access.

Affordable aviation access is closely linked to liveability outcomes. The City of Karratha had a population of approximately 24,716 in 2024, with a relatively young demographic profile and high workforce participation. Sustaining stable regional populations in locations such as the Pilbara is important not only for community wellbeing, but also for supporting industries that contribute significantly to Australia's economy.

From a personal perspective, aviation functions as essential infrastructure that enables regional families to participate fully in Australian social, educational and cultural life. Ensuring equitable access to air services supports long-term regional commitment and strengthens the communities that underpin nationally significant economic activity.

Should you have any questions or require further details, please contact me on the details provided.