

Submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee

Regarding the decision made by Qantas (Qantas Airways Limited) on 1 October 2025 to close its regional staff bases in Canberra, Hobart and Mildura

I have been part of National Jet Systems (Qantas Group subsidiary) for over thirteen years. When I commenced employment with NJS its primary base structure was in the regional cities of Cairns, Darwin and Perth. Later NJS was expanded to include additional bases in Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart and Sydney. These base locations played an important part in my and many of my colleague's decision to apply to work at NJS. Many employees at the bases of Canberra and Hobart were living at these locations by choice, whether it be for family connections to the areas, community involvement or simply for the lifestyle of smaller cities.

Over time NJS has evolved from a company that provided a lifestyle option of residing in regional cities to now only providing a choice between Australia's three largest cities. In the past ten years the base structure at NJS has changed with numerous base openings, expansions, downsizings and closures creating a constant state of flux for its employees.

Examples of these changes include:

- Darwin:
 - Downsized in 2016
 - Closed in 2018
- Cairns:
 - Downsized in 2016
 - Expanded in 2017
 - Downsized in 2018
 - Closed in late 2020
- Perth
 - Expanded in 2018
 - Closed in late 2020
- Melbourne:
 - Opened in early 2021 (with most staff relocated from Cairns and Perth)
- Canberra & Hobart
 - Both opened in 2015
 - Both to be closed in 2026

Throughout these changes some crew and their families have been involuntarily displaced more than once within a period of a few years. This has had various impacts on mental health due to the feeling that you can never truly settle down in a location, families with partners needing to seek new employment, children having to change schools and financially with costs associated with buying and selling property, often from a market with lower house prices to a new market with higher prices.

Regularly after a base closure Qantas later resumes operations from these locations but by utilising a different subsidiary or contractor with a similar size aircraft type. Examples include:

- Darwin
 - Subsequently served by Network Aviation (Qantas Group subsidiary) operated by crew on multi-day trips from Perth and later by Alliance Airlines (under contract to the Qantas Group) with the later opening a crew base in Darwin
- Cairns
 - Subsequently serviced by Alliance Airlines (under contract to the Qantas Group) with crew based in Cairns
- Perth
 - Subsequently serviced by expanding Network Aviation's (Qantas Group subsidiary) Perth base

Despite Qantas continuing to serve these locations, it is not easy for crew to transfer between business units to stay in their desired location. Additionally, if a crew member changes between Qantas owned subsidiaries it can come at the expense of rank and seniority. If the desired location is subsequently serviced by a contractor and not a Qantas owned subsidiary, not only would the crew member possibly lose rank but forgo accrued benefits such as long service leave.

When staff were informed that the bases of Canberra and Hobart were being reviewed it was clear from the language being used from the outset that the decision had already been made to close the bases with many statements being made by management regarding how best to support relocating staff and that closure of the bases would support network resilience. Despite multiple assurances that no decisions had been made and stating that they wanted to have consultations with crew at Canberra and Hobart, management chose to overlook the genuine concerns highlighted by staff regarding the inefficient rostering practices that were in place and how they could be rectified along with the emotional toll it would have on staff and their families.

By closing bases in regional locations and crewing flights from fewer locations it reduces the ability to quickly recover flights from crew disruptions. It is not possible or commercially economical to have crew based at every port serviced, but to close existing bases at ports that are served by a high frequency of flights is counter intuitive when the stated purpose of the closure is to increase resilience. These closures will result in the need to overnight multiple crews to service the late night arrival and early morning departure needs of these locations. With the proposal to reduce the crew bases to only Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne any disruption due to crewing at Canberra or Hobart will require several hours to recover with the need to reposition a crew member from another location to service the flight, which in turn will have further disruptions to the services assigned to that aircraft for the day.

The closure of bases in regional areas, in addition to risking to the reliability of services to these areas, it also reduces employment opportunities in regional locations, with a knock-on effect of reducing economic spending in these communities. Also, by relocating these jobs to high population centres it puts upward pressure on housing prices in housing constrained markets and stretches the availability of public services in these large cities.

The Qantas Group have put forward a commuting package to the affected staff, but it lacks assurances that it is workable and is designed to entice employees to instead relocate from Canberra and Hobart to a new location. It is ultimately a package that has been designed to be able to say to the public that they have provided the ability for staff to stay in their desired location whilst in reality it is likely to be untenable for the employee to maintain a true work and family life balance without relocating.