

Senate Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References.

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a Lord Howe Island resident, I write concerning the action of the service airline, SmartLynx, in withdrawing resident discount fare eligibility from all but permanent residents of the island.

Lord Howe was serviced by Qantas for about 35 years. During that period, Qantas offered a resident fare for islanders which was at a considerable discount to the standard fare. Qantas extended this discounted fare to friends and relatives of islanders, provided that they resided with the islanders while on Lord Howe. When Skytrans took over the Sydney/Lord Howe route in early 2025, we were advised that all Qantas benefits available to island residents would be retained. Since then, Skytrans has been taken over by SmartLynx who have withdrawn the islander discount fare from all but island residents. This is a distressing development.

Lord Howe is a remote community. If we wish to unite with family or friends residing on the mainland, we must fly to them or they fly to us on Lord Howe. There is no alternative, cheaper travel which mainland resident can access. Bus, train or drive are not options for us so we are at the mercy of the airline operators. The resident discount fare provided by Qantas for friends and relatives of islanders was greatly appreciated and enabled reunions both on and off Lord Howe which would otherwise have been, for many, economically impossible. Citing my own case, my daughter with husband and two children live in Brisbane. Return flights Brisbane to Lord Howe travelling 30 Dec 25 and 13 Jan 26 (a two week break) would now cost \$2667 each, \$10668 for the family which, for many, would be impossible. Access to the resident fare would reduce that cost to about \$4000 which would put it within reach.

For SmartLynx to now regard everyone other than an island resident as a 'tourist' and to charge the relevant airfare unwittingly puts essential services personnel, staff and carers who have no alternative means of transport to the island, in the 'tourist' category and curtails their travel, adversely affecting businesses and residents alike. Tourists have a choice as to whether or not to travel to Lord Howe. We, the island residents and those on whom we rely for the functioning of the community, do not. The extension of discounted airfares to such personnel together with relatives and friends as was afforded by Qantas should be regarded, for a remote community such as Lord Howe, as an essential service.

When Skytrans replaced Qantas as the service airline, island representatives were included in relevant negotiations. To my knowledge, the transfer to SmartLynx has been covert with no opportunity for residents to express any concerns. SmartLynx should be advised to revisit the issue and extend the resident discount fare to the cohort of agencies as was provided by Qantas.

Stanley Fenton  
7 December 2025