

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Dear Ministers,

My name is Dr Michael John Busser, and I am a staff specialist anaesthetist who resides in Brisbane. I was approached nearly two years ago by a colleague about an outreach opportunity to help provide care to an underserviced area working out of Gladstone Hospital. At the time, two Rural GPs with Anaesthetic upskilling had suddenly retired and the local surgeon Dr. Rob Schreiber was contemplating closing his offices as a result of having no Anaesthetic services to facilitate his surgery.

Gladstone, like many regional and remote hospitals has had difficulty recruiting medical specialists to live and work locally, and often runs their hospital at reduced staff with locum doctors providing coverage for essential services.

As a staff specialist who trained in Queensland, I had heard throughout medical school of the challenges of healthcare access to those in rural and remote communities, and saw the value in trying to help establish an essential outreach group to help provide care to the regional community of Gladstone, Queensland.

Working with a number of colleagues out of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, we managed to devise a Fly-In, Fly-Out roster that would allow us to hold our public appointments and responsibilities in Brisbane, while also assisting Dr. Schreiber in providing essential care in Gladstone.

Unfortunately, over the past 24 months, we have experienced an alarming increase in last-minute airline cancellations and significant delays on the primarily Qantas routes servicing this region. **These cancellations have directly resulted in:**

- * Same-day cancellation of patient surgeries - causing significant stress and anxiety
- * Loss of operating theatre lists and clinical capacity
- * Delayed care for urgent conditions

Of my last three trips to Gladstone, all three have involved flight cancellations or significant delays - unfortunately resulting in multiple patients being turned away **on the morning of their procedure (after performing bowel prep for more than 24 hours in the lead up).**

On a personal note, I have been personally affected - as the flight **the night before my wedding** was unexpectedly cancelled leaving me stranded in Gladstone. Despite

contacting their customer care immediately and being rebooked on the next available flight, this morning flight was **ALSO CANCELLED last minute**. Despite being a regular customer and so called valued frequent flyer, I was unable to make it back from Gladstone on any offered flight in time for the scheduled wedding. As a result I had to spend nearly 1000\$ in additional unexpected expenses to travel home via Rockhampton. These are not costs the average person can, or should be expected to carry. Despite that, at the time of writing this email Qantas still has not processed my reimbursement claim.

Unfortunately the delays have become so frequent and predictable that some of the clinicians involved in our service are withdrawing from outreach work altogether due to unreliability which **may result in the impending collapse of the service altogether**.

This is no longer an operational inconvenience — it is *a direct threat to the safety and sustainability of medical care in regional Australia*.

I respectfully request that your office consider protective measures, including:

1. Designation of key medical outreach routes as essential, requiring greater cancellation safeguards and perhaps prioritization in event of schedule disruptions
2. Accountability and compensation from the airlines who regularly prioritize profits over the people they are meant to serve
3. Engagement with airlines to improve reliability and earlier communication about disruption on these routes

Without intervention, this service will cease — not because clinicians do not wish to serve, but because it is logistically impossible to do so. I would welcome the opportunity to provide further details or contribute to your committee if required.

Sincerely,
Dr Michael John Busser