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**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS
AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

My name is Susan Bradley. I am a member of the Regional Development Australia – Kimberley.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend in person on 3 April so I am writing my submission.

As a Kimberley resident for 50 years I have relied on both commercial air services, charter air services and the RASS service to isolated stations.

In 1982 I sat on the Inquiry into Air Transport Services in Western Australia.

Here are some of my observations –

- Our Kimberley air services have deteriorated since the MMA days. In the seventies and eighties we had 3 MMA Fokker F28 flights to and from the Kimberley daily. Perth/Port Hedland/Broome/Derby/Kununurra/Darwin – and two of these were return flights. The Department of Air Transport operated the airports.
- MMA also operated a Otter service which co-ordinated with one flight daily to both Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek.
- Airfares were reasonable and not out of the reach of non-government residents. The Health Department used MMA to transport patients to and from Hospitals – both to Perth and intra-Kimberley. Most government employees and their families were given a return flight to Perth annually.
- MMA was followed by Ansett who brought in the BAE 146. Services changed. Instead of the milk-run, Ansett operated twice daily from Perth direct to Broome, Derby, Kununurra and Darwin.
- With the mining boom, Ansett flew many services to both Port Hedland and Karratha and the Pilbara and Kimberley were separated.
- Qantas and Skywest took over after the collapse of Ansett. Skywest was bought out by Virgin. Air North based in Darwin was formed. Qantas and Virgin and Air North service Broome and Kununurra. Derby has been left without a daily regional airline service.

The biggest disadvantage for Kimberley people today as I see it are the prohibitive airfares – both from the south and intra-Kimberley and into Darwin. These airfares and the lack of availability of seats is hindering tourism and locals alike.

Although I do not have official statistics - there are very few private paying passengers on any flights.

The flights into and out of both Broome and Kununurra are full of Government paid passengers. Either on Government – both Federal and State – employees on work related travel.

I suspect the Department of Health, and the PATS scheme pay for both patients and their carers going to and from Perth for medical attention.

The Education Department and the Police and Justice Departments have a large number of passengers.

There are now also many passengers – FIFO workers flying in and out of Broome for work off-shore paid for by mining/gas companies. Dozens of these workers are seen on most flights.

None of these passengers pay their own fares and many would not even know what their Department or Company is paying for them.

The problem this causes is that there is absolutely no incentive for the airlines to keep their fares down, or even be competitive. The Government never asks for discount fares – or even asks what the fares are – they book them online and accept what seats and airfares are available.

This leaves very little room for tourists wanting to visit Broome or Kununurra or for locals wanting their families to visit.

A family of 4 can fly to Bali and have a week's accommodation for the price of one return airfare to Broome – with no accommodation.

Broome as a destination – even for weddings – is now becoming prohibitively expensive and visitor numbers are declining.

I hope the Senate Committee will also look at the airfares INTRA Kimberley/NT. Darwin to Broome for Easter is \$1300, and Broome to Darwin \$1200.

Kununurra to Broome one way this week is \$582 and Kununurra to Darwin \$549. This makes it prohibitive for average people to travel by air.

This is what is holding tourism back in the Kimberley.

It is imperative that this Senate Inquiry looks into the airfares – and the causes why they are so high. Look at the passengers paid for by the public purse. It is having a huge impact on families in the Kimberley and they are definitely the reason why so many people have left towns like Broome, Derby and Kununurra because they feel they can't afford to 'get out' for holidays.

RASS – the RASS service that is so vital to remote communities is also becoming very costly for isolated stations. It appears today that the service is run to suit the supplier/charter plane operator without the understanding or care of those people is it meant to service.

Aviair in Kununurra has made a big announcement that it will run three times a week a RPT service to Kalumburu. The fare ONE WAY is \$369.00. Out of reach of the aboriginal people who are primarily on centrelink payments. However once again it is the government bureaucrats who can utilize the service as they don't even ask what the fare is. Once again it is the taxpayer who is footing the bill.

I am pleased you are having this enquiry, and if you would like any further information or opinion from me, I am happy to oblige.

Thank you,
Yours sincerely,

(Signed)

SUSAN BRADLEY JP