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Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Committee Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a preliminary submission regarding Qantas/QantasLink's decision to close its regional staff bases in Canberra, Hobart and Mildura. In the context of the inquiry into the state of Australia's aviation sector and its capacity to deliver reliable and affordable services to rural, regional and remote communities, this submission addresses the implications for Canberra and the surrounding region.

The recent decision by Qantas to close bases in Canberra, Hobart, and Mildura affects approximately 70 regional staff, including around 30 based in the ACT.

The ACT Government understands the decision followed a review by Qantas to consider consolidating smaller bases into major hubs (like Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane) to better manage disruptions and delays.

At the time of the announcement, Qantas explained the decision enabled the airline to:

- improve operational efficiency and reliability;
- enable faster recovery from disruptions by concentrating staff in larger, scalable hubs; and
- align with QantasLink's modernisation strategy, including the introduction of new aircraft to expand regional services.

Immediate impact

Beyond the impact on jobs and relocations, the decision diminishes Canberra's role as a strategic aviation hub, a city which supports a diverse, highly skilled professional community, and one which is consistently ranked among the highest for quality of life in Australia.

Reliable and affordable air services are critical to the economic, social, and strategic interests of Canberra and its surrounding region. While Qantas has pledged to maintain flight schedules and explore future international services, operational resilience remains critical - particularly during parliamentary sitting periods or adverse weather events. Any decline in reliability could significantly impact economic activity.

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Canberra's regional aviation role

Canberra is the gateway to a diverse region encompassing the Snowy Mountains, the South Coast and the Southern Tablelands, with a catchment population approaching 900,000 people. The region has access to a world-class aviation and transport hub in Canberra Airport.

While Canberra is considered a regional base in this context, Qantas has long supported the Canberra region through its QantasLink network, enabling:

- Canberra's role as the nation's capital to be reinforced through strong transport links for government, business, and tourism;
- creation of skilled aviation jobs in local communities; and
- opportunities for staff to live and work in their home regions, contributing to local economies and communities.

Market dynamics and competition

The collapse of regional carriers such as Rex and Bonza has reduced competition and connectivity for regional communities, including Canberra. These airlines previously provided essential services to smaller towns and cities, ensuring choice and affordability.

Qantas' decision to consolidate operations in major capital cities by removing crew bases from Canberra, Hobart, and Mildura further erodes regional engagement and undermines aviation's role in supporting regional communities.

Strategic value of Canberra

Canberra offers exceptional quality of life and work-life balance for highly skilled professionals and their families. In 2025, Oxford Economics ranked Canberra as the number one city globally for quality of life, citing strong infrastructure, safety, education, and sustainability.

As Australia's capital city, Canberra is also not simply a regional hub. It is a critical node in the national transport network as the centre of Australia's government, leading cultural assets and diplomatic community.

The ACT community provides Qantas with a diverse and high-value market, including government, business, education, diplomatic, and leisure travel. This unique combination delivers strong yields on Canberra routes, with airfares often above the national average due to premium demand.

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In addition, Canberra offers access to world-class academic institutions, a pipeline of skilled labour, and opportunities to leverage an extensive research and development ecosystem to guide the future of aviation.

The ACT Government encourages Qantas to explore opportunities to expand its presence in Canberra and to partner with the ACT Government and Canberra Airport to strengthen regional connectivity and support the aviation sector's long-term sustainability.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this initial submission.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister

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