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Western Meat Exporters Pty Ltd
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20 December 2017

The Senate Enquiry
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

Re Qantaslink Regional air routes

Dear Sir/Madam

We are hoping your Senate Enquiry will be able to assist us with a very concerning issue affecting Charleville and other regional communities at present and for the past 6 months especially.

We note that the government is offering funding and other incentives to promote jobs in regional Queensland.

Whilst the bush has a completely different lifestyle to our city counterparts which city folk may seek looking for a 'sea change'. In order to attract people to the bush, we also require essential services for example assured daily flight services from Qantas as well as Educational and Health Facilities and indeed reliable internet and phone service for our community and businesses to operate effectively and in order to attract people to live and/or visit our remote communities.

It is our understanding that Qantaslink are contracted to service regional areas such as Charleville on a daily basis. Qantas have delivered reliable daily services between Charleville Brisbane return for over 30 years. However, for the past 18 months and very frequently in the last 6 months, Qantas has cancelled flights to and from Charleville on a very regular basis with no reason provided or sometimes residents are offered an alternative by Qantaslink to travel by bus to Roma and fly from Roma to Brisbane and vice versa. An anticipated hour and half travel time flight can ultimately turn into a 6-8 hour travel trip with no refund for flight provided.

Western Meat Exporters is Australia's largest export goat processor and Queensland's only export sheep processor as well as being the largest employer in South West Queensland. We rely very heavily on **external** stakeholders such as suppliers, maintenance personnel etc to assist us in keeping our plant and equipment operating effectively and efficiently and to its full potential where possible. However, these flight issues are affecting our business as there have been many occasions where our visitors and/or suppliers of equipment have been unable to return to Brisbane or their city work base as scheduled due to Qantaslink cancelling flights usually with very short notice. It is imperative to Western Meat Exporters operations that we are able to offer our external stakeholders the choice of a reliable daily flight service in order to meet our commitments to clients, suppliers, staff and the community.

This current situation with Qantaslink flights is not acceptable and creating dire consequences for our overall community. How are we successfully going to attract people to come and work in regional areas if we have a very poor and extremely unreliable service from Qantaslink? It is our view that Charleville and its surrounding areas



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will struggle initially to gain enough confidence in Qantaslink again, should the situation be eventually resolved, to increase the number of people using Qantaslink service and be able to fully utilise the Qantaslink 400's if this constant unreliable service continues. The unreliability of Qantas flights is deterring many people from flying and they are opting to drive which is not always the best option for residents who have serious health concerns and are visiting specialist in Brisbane. This unreliability also affects the majority of local businesses due to representatives from their suppliers etc opting not to visit local businesses as often as they would normally as they are often stranded in Charleville or miss connecting flights, as they are on a bus instead of a flight or no flight at all.

Charleville airport was built by the Americans during the war and subsequently continues to be used by the Defence Department to land their aircraft and used as a practice landing base at times, therefore it is a very important backup air base and capable of landing any of Qantaslink fleet of planes.

We are aware the local Council has addressed these issues with representatives from Qantaslink and we have attended forums with representatives with Qantaslink however the situation is getting worse not better.

We are also aware that there is an issue between Qantaslink and the local Council with Charleville Airport not having security at present and the Qantaslink 400 not able to land due to Department of Transport guidelines. However, it is my understanding Qantaslink has a contract to service Charleville with daily flights. Why has Qantas sold off most of their Qantaslink 300 when they still had an obligation to service Charleville and other regional areas under their current contract.

Our local member Ann Leahy has also advised that the Department of Transport is allowing Qantaslink 400's to land without security in the short term at Charleville while this situation is being rectified. However, Qantaslink are still not flying the 400 aircraft to Charleville when there are issues with the 300 Aircraft.

Small communities such as Charleville already struggle to entice people to come and work in our areas. Losing these services will indeed make our community sustainability situation even more dire.

We join our Council and community in seeking a solution to this very concerning issue in the very near future otherwise the sustainability of our rural community will most definitely be affected.

Please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] or Tanya Sentinella [REDACTED] to discuss further.

Yours faithfully

For and on behalf of:
Campbell McPhee
Managing Director