

Inquiry: The State of Australia's aviation sector and its ability to deliver reliable and affordable services to rural, regional and remote communities

SmartLynx, Extraordinarily Excessive Airfares, and Loss of Residents' Discount:

A Personal Plea

[As sent to the Lord Howe Island Board, replicated here]

As I see that the majority of salient & sensible counter-arguments have been addressed and submitted by many other outraged Lord Howe Island locals, and can be taken as read, I would just like to respectfully ask, regarding the abolition of the Island's Residents' Fare by SmartLynx:

What fresh hell is this???

Timed to come into effect right at the beginning of the high-season, and therefore peak-season airfares?

Following are just a few of the truly crucial areas that the severe curtailing of our "Residents' Airfare" discount will affect the individuals & families of LHI financially, medically and socially, as this totally outrageous scheme goes ahead on 1st December, 2025.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Lord Howe Island residents (and, of course, visitors) routinely & continually suffer from the unreliability of our air service past and present – often on a daily basis – but at least have been able to celebrate significant family & calendar events together, even if delayed, due to the Residents' Fare for family and friends: a more-or-less (comparatively) reasonable, **set** price of \$400 one-way to budget for, **not** adjusted seasonally, for those invited to stay in our homes.

Incidentally, these guests make a noteworthy contribution to the Island economy through expenditure in the museum, shops & restaurants: particularly in the off-season when visitor numbers are down. They can better afford to: they haven't blown everything on a ridiculously over-inflated airfare.

With the loss of the cheaper airfare for these highly valued visitors, also goes the opportunity for locals to celebrate events such as Christmas or a wedding ceremony, at their special spot on their Island, should they wish to have mainland family (even parents or children!) or friends stay with them to share these important occasions.

Hosting such events can be extremely costly due to the Island shops' high retail prices due to shipping costs, or personal freight costs if importing food etc. Adding airfares possibly three times the Residents' rate (\$1,200 one-way) I suppose is an excellent way to ensure the guest list, and therefore catering, would be at a minimum.

And as for significant events off-Island; what economic sacrifices will need to be made in other areas so that a parent can attend their child's award ceremony? Or take part in a wedding, christening, 21st birthday celebrations or even a funeral of someone close?

PROFESSIONAL HELP eg TRADIES...

Again, as freight costs for building materials etc are, of course, tremendous, I have been able to financially better manage essential repairs/renovations by providing accommodation in my residence, The Barn, for tradies that I needed to have flown in as there was no availability locally.

To this end, I have provided airfares for vital professional help from tilers, plumbers, electricians, and, most recently, traditional shipwrights to restore our boat the Albatross built by my grandfather in 1936.

No way could any average Island resident needing assistance of this kind cope with these exorbitant airfares, on top of high wages, when engaging off-Island professionals to take care of our often historically valuable homes.

MEDICAL/DISABILITY ISSUES ...

My wheelchair-bound mother suffers from long-term rheumatoid arthritis, and in the last eighteen months has been diagnosed with cancer.

Are we to pay an airfare possibly in excess of \$2000 to have her full-time, beloved Carer accompany her on her final visit to her home of 5 generations?

This live-in Carer accompanied us twice to the Island on the Residents' Fare during my father's last visits while he suffered a terminal illness – I could not possibly manage both frail, disabled parents on my own – and I had incredible difficulty finding anyone local willing or able to relieve her and myself, even for a few hours.

Indeed, I had to resort to flying in another Carer from the mainland at a later point.

This was again manageable because of the discounted airfares provided.

Furthermore, countless residents have been able to rely on the fixed airfare and budget accordingly when needing dental or medical procedures or consultations – *how many*

*potentially serious conditions will **not** be treated on the mainland due to financial constraints?*

PROVIDE GOVERNMENT ISSUED PHOTO I.D

I am in the not-uncommon position of being an Islander (6th generation), but needing to be on the mainland not only for my mother's ongoing medical treatment, but for employment in my profession of primary school teacher (extremely limited scope for a position at the LHI Central School). Because of this, we also have a Sydney residence, but try to return to the Island – that we consider our Home – during school holidays.

So, if I have my mainland address on my ID documentation, I don't count as an Island resident & therefore need to pay the unbelievably inflated airfare during these holiday, peak-season, times?

Do I need to go through the process of changing my driver's licence address every time I want/need to return home?

UNWARRANTED/UNFAIR DISADVANTAGE

Why are we being further disadvantaged by *SmartLynx* when we are already part of such a high cost-of-living society on the Island?

Because they hold the monopoly of the flight route and, therefore, they just CAN?

I'm not sure how tenable the visitors' fares are going to be for much longer: SO many people I personally speak to would not, as much as they'd absolutely love to, travel to Lord Howe not only on account of the incredible cost, but because of the unreliability of the air service (if several days out of a 7 day holiday may well be lost, is it worth the risk at such a high price?).

I am greatly concerned about the continuation of a thriving tourist trade on the Island.

So much better value-for-money to holiday in South-East Asia... or even Europe.

CONCLUSION

The abolition of the Lord Howe Island Residents' Fare is potentially an absolute disaster for locals forced to pay up to three times more per airline ticket for making their home Lord Howe Island: a community already with a high cost of living associated with it.

I see this financial blow resulting in further repercussions: our family & social ties weakened; essential repairs and restorations in our homes neglected; our health issues set aside; and our quality of life deteriorating.

With many thanks for your attention from

Kate McFadyen