

**Submission
No 38**

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES

Organisation: Coonamble Chamber of Commerce

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13th March 2013

The Hon Rick Colless MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on State Development
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

Re: **Regional Aviation Services in Coonamble**

Coonamble Shire is a small regional community with a population of 4700 people who have been without aviation services since December 2008 when REX claimed they could no longer commercially justify operations on "thinner routes". Reasons quoted were soaring fuel prices and regulatory requirements plus a serious shortage of pilots.

This was a major setback to the community and surrounding district as Dubbo Airport is approximately 2 hours travelling by car from Coonamble and a further 2.5 hour flight to Sydney with a one-way trip by car to Sydney taking around 7 hours and 12 hours by Countrylink bus/train via Dubbo.

In comparison a flight from Coonamble to Sydney via Dubbo would take around 2.5 hours including transfer times. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that regular flight services from Coonamble would be well utilised by our community and surrounding district to improve access to medical and other services. It would also encourage business investment and maintain investor confidence, attract and retain population along with supporting tourism and in particular major events held in the Shire which attract national and inter-national competitors and spectators. The loss of aviation services to Coonamble disconnects regional communities from a wide range of health, business and other services and also adds to the financial overheads of local businesses, individuals and organisations.

The Coonamble Aboriginal Health Service (CAHS) provides vital and very successful medical and health services but unfortunately are forced to bear the cost of flights for locum Medical Practitioners and Specialists on a weekly basis from Sydney and then hire a vehicle from Dubbo.

Due to the lack of easy access to flights the locums are faced with unnecessary overnight accommodation which is an added expense for CAHS. What should be a 1 day visit becomes a 3 day visit which is not only a financial burden but also time consuming.

Coonamble Shire Council keeps a fully-functional all-weather airport and has a well-appointed Passenger Terminal available for use. The airfield easily accommodates any size RPT aircraft. Coonamble is a Controlled Airfield with well-maintained security fencing, a 1500m sealed runway, automatic weather station on the airfield, two published instrument approaches with remote access night lights, and radar coverage from Brisbane in the area. Coonamble is one of the few airfields between Dubbo and the Queensland border which have Aviation Fuel available seven days per week.

In conclusion the re-establishment of aviation services to Coonamble would play a critical role in retaining our current population and attracting new residents as well as new industry and new services to the community.

Donna Swansborough
Chairperson
Coonamble Chamber of Commerce