

**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

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Our Ref: LF:EA File: 20591

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

16 September 2025

The Hon Catherine King MP
Minister
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: Minister.King@mo.infrastructure.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Aviation Consumer Protections Consultation Paper

Bourke Shire Council, as the owner and operator of the Bourke Airport welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Aviation Consumer Protections Consultation Paper, as released on 8 September 2025.

Whilst Council supports the Government's objective to strengthen consumer protections in aviation, it is deeply concerned that the framework, as currently proposed, will impose significant, disproportionate and counterproductive burdens on smaller airports such as the Bourke Airport.

Similar to the majority of remote Australian airports, the Bourke Airport is essential to our community in terms of connectivity for health care, education, tourism, and economic opportunities. Some 60 per cent of council-owned airports across Australia operate at an annual financial loss, with this certainly being the situation for Bourke Airport. Airports like ours don't raise income from landing, parking, or taxi fees or from food and retail income, as is the case at the larger regional or city located airports.

The airport has a three (3) days a week RPT service from Dubbo, through the operation of an eight (8) seater aircraft. The operation of this service is only possible through the provision of funding from the NSW Government. Without this funding, the flights cease. In 2024, 298 passengers utilised the near 150 return flights available throughout the

year. The Bourke Airport has no full-time staff. It is inspected daily by Council staff who depart the airport to undertake other duties in the Shire once the inspections are completed.

The cost of operating and maintaining the Bourke Airport was \$217,000 in 2024/2025. This funding is sourced from Councils limited rate base of \$1.8m per year.

Capital works are only possible through grant programs such as the Regional Airport Upgrade Program (RAUP). This funding provides welcome short-term relief.

Simply put Minister, the addition of new compliance and levy obligations will see scarce resources diverted away from not just airport operations, but from Council activities in general. As a remote Council, we can't afford new compliance and levy obligations in respect of our Airport.

It is understood that there is no other country in the world where a consumer scheme has been implemented that requires airports to also participate. The consultation paper itself acknowledges that airlines, and not airports, are responsible for the majority of operations captured by the proposed framework. Without a minimum threshold, the proposed scheme will impose unsustainable compliance costs on smaller airports while delivering little, if any, additional benefit to consumers.

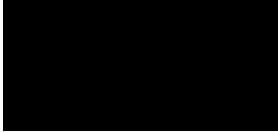
On behalf of Council, the Government is urged to:

- Exempt airports with fewer than one million passengers annually from the framework, consistent with international best practice such as the UK's Aviation ADR scheme, which covers 91.7% of passengers by including only larger airports.
- Ensure that costs are proportionate, with levies primarily recovered from airlines, who hold the direct contractual relationship with passengers.
- Align the framework with existing legislative and regulatory obligations to prevent duplication and productivity loss.
- Provide flexibility and staged implementation to avoid further undermining the financial viability of regional airports.

Strengthening consumer protections should not come at the expense of regional connectivity, community access or national productivity.

Council seeks your reconsideration of the current approach to ensure reforms are effective, proportionate and sustainable for airports like Bourke Airport.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Lachlan Ford
Mayor Bourke Shire

cc:

