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11 September 2025

Hon Catherine King MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: Minister.King@mo.infrastructure.gov.au

Dear Minister

Impact of Aviation Consumer Protections Consultation on Smaller Airports

Diamantina Shire Council owns and operates the Bedourie, Birdsville, and Betoota Airports and we welcome the opportunity to respond to the Aviation Consumer Protections Consultation Paper released on 8 September 2025.

While we support the Government's objective to strengthen consumer protections in aviation, we are deeply concerned that the framework, as currently proposed, will impose significant, disproportionate, and counterproductive burdens on smaller airports such as ours.

The majority of Australian airports are regional or remote, essential to their communities for health care, education, tourism, and economic opportunity. Yet around 60 per cent of council-owned airports operate at a financial loss each year, requiring subsidies from already stretched local governments. The collapse of Bonza and uncertainty surrounding REX Airlines has only heightened the fragility of regional aviation. While grant programs such as the Regional Airports Program (RAP) and the Regional Airport Upgrade Program (RAUP) provide welcome short-term relief, there remains no sustainable, long-term funding mechanism to support critical works at these airports.

Bedourie and Birdsville airports have only 4, Regular Public Transport (RPT) flights per week, with annual passenger numbers not exceeding 5000 passengers per year. Both airports employ part time staff who have other roles in the community outside of RPT scheduled flights. Both airports run at a loss and require cross subsidisation from other Council revenue streams.

Against this backdrop, adding new compliance and levy obligations risks diverting scarce resources away from practical improvements such as resurfacing/ lighting upgrades/ linemarking maintenance etc. This could undermine productivity by creating duplication, confusion and administrative inefficiency — at a time when the Government has rightly identified reducing red tape and boosting productivity as national priorities.

Introducing an additional consumer protection framework risks confusing passengers, duplicating obligations and undermining productivity — shifting effort into multiple overlapping compliance regimes rather than delivering genuine service improvements.

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

We urge the Government 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. We ask for a reconsideration of the current approach to ensure reforms are effective, proportionate and sustainable for airports like ours.

Yours sincerely,

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Cr Francis Murray
Mayor