



Australian Government  
Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

This is a Meeting  
Brief for  
Information

<b>FOR: The Hon Darren Chester MP</b> cc: Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary Ms Pip Spence, A/g Deputy Secretary	<b>PDR ID:</b> MB17-000211	<b>Ministerial action required:</b> 5 April 2017  <b>Reason:</b> Meeting Date
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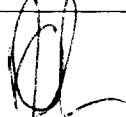
<b>SUBJECT: Regional Access to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport (KSA)</b>
<b>MEETING WITH: The Hon Andrew Constance MP, NSW Minister for Transport and Infrastructure</b>
<b>TIME/DATE: 8pm, Wednesday 5 April 2017</b>
<b>VENUE: NSW Parliament House</b>

## Purpose of Meeting

1. You are meeting with the Hon Andrew Constance MP, NSW Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, to discuss improving regional access for New South Wales communities to KSA. Mr Constance wrote to you last week regarding recommendations from a 2014 NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Regional Aviation Services (**Attachment A**). It is expected that Mr Constance will ask you to consider the recommendations.

## Main Issues and Expected Outcomes

1. The NSW Legislative Council established an Inquiry into regional aviation services in New South Wales on 13 December 2013. The final report from this inquiry was published on 23 October 2014, several recommendations from the Inquiry request the Australian Government to assess the potential to adopt the Committee's recommended approach to slot allocation.
2. The Department is aware of the NSW regional services inquiry report completed some years ago. However the letter received on 29 March 2017 is the first correspondence from the NSW Government requesting a response to the inquiry recommendations.
3. In a meeting on 14 March 2017, you asked the Department to explore options regarding demand management and capacity reform at Sydney Airport. The Department is currently developing potential options which could improve regional access to Sydney Airport.
4. You may consider advising Minister Constance that you will discuss the inquiry recommendations with your Department and come back to him with your response.
5. The NSW Government and regional aviation industry stakeholders have consistently advocated for an increase of the movement cap from 80 to 85 movements per hour. Minister Constance recently authored an editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald (**Attachment B**) where he suggested increasing

Cleared by: Stephen Borthwick, A/g Executive Director Date: 5 April 2017 Phone: 6274 7086 Division: Aviation and Airports	 DARREN CHESTER 5/4/17
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the cap to 85 but limiting the additional slots to regional services to limit the noise impact on the local community.

6. On 7 November 2016, you met with the Hon Stuart Ayres MP, the former NSW Minister for Trade, Tourism and Major Events who is understood to support raising the movement cap but favours assigning additional capacity to high value international flights, indicating the views of the NSW Ministers differ on whether additional capacity should be allocated to regional or international services.
7. Sydney Airport would of course strongly favour additional international flights. They have indicated they hold concerns about any measures that would redirect capacity from international and interstate services to NSW regional services. They have also indicated concerns that any increase in small sized regional aircraft would add to airfield congestion in the peak periods.
8. Previous preliminary discussions with your Parliamentary colleagues indicate there is not bi-partisan support for amending the legislation to authorise additional movements.

## Sensitivities

There has been media coverage regarding this issue, with Mr Constance publicly accusing the Australian Government of being “completely and utterly out of touch on what is required to drive regional aviation opportunities”. An example of recent media coverage of this issue can be found at [Attachment C](#).

There have also been accusations of the Australian Government not responding to the NSW Legislative Inquiry on regional aviation services. The Department was aware of the NSW regional services inquiry report completed some years ago, however the letter received on 29 March 2017 is the first correspondence to you or your predecessor from the NSW Government requesting a response to the inquiry recommendations.

## Talking Points

- Thank you for sending me a copy of the recommendations from the Inquiry into Regional Aviation Services.
- I recognise this is a major issue for you and for regional NSW communities.
- Regional access is an important issue for the Government and I have previously stated my willingness to consider proposals to improve the current situation.
- I will ask my Department to have a detailed look into the issues raised and will respond to you.
- I should note though – this remains a highly sensitive issue for noise affected communities around Sydney Airport.
- The Government remains committed to facilitating additional access where possible to address this issue. However, community sensitives about aircraft noise mean there are no easy solutions to the problem.
- Any increase to the movement cap would require bi-partisan support to enact changes to the primary legislation. This poses a significant challenge and is not feasible at this time.
- Changes to arrangements need to strike the right balance between increasing productivity and protecting community amenity and would be subject to public consultation.

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- The Government also supports NSW regional access to KSA through long-standing pricing protections for regional airlines. Pricing protections were renewed in May 2016 for a further term of three years capped at 2002 levels.
- The Government is actively addressing Sydney's long-term aviation capacity needs through its commitment to the Western Sydney Airport at Badgerys Creek. This new airport will provide extra aviation capacity within the Sydney region, with the airport expected to handle 10 million passengers a year five years after opening.
- The Western Sydney Airport will also provide new opportunities for regional areas to connect to Western Sydney, where the population is set to double over the next 20 years. However the operation of direct flights between the Western Sydney Airport and regional New South Wales will ultimately be a commercial decision for airlines.

## Attached Biographical Details



The Hon. Andrew Constance MP,  
NSW Minister for Transport and Infrastructure

Minister Constance has been a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly since 2003, representing the electorate of Bega as a member of the Liberal Party of Australia.

The Minister has previously served as the Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations during 2014 and 2015, the Minister for Finance and Services, Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability prior to that.

## Background

The Australian Government has a long-standing commitment to limit as far as possible the impact of aircraft noise on residents living near KSA. There are three key measures in place to manage this impact: the movement cap; the curfew; and noise sharing arrangements implemented through the Long Term Operating Plan.

Collectively these measures balance the competing economic, social and environmental interests of stakeholders, and strike a balance between the interests of the airport, airlines, tourism, businesses, passengers and the communities surrounding the airport.

### *KSA Movement cap*

Legislation was enacted in 1997 to establish the maximum limit on the number of aircraft movements per hour at KSA. The *Sydney Airport Demand Management Act 1997* establishes a maximum of 80 aircraft runway movements in any regulated hour during the non-curfew hours. The regulated hour is a rolling hour calculated every 15 minutes. For the purposes of the movement cap, aircraft movements are defined in the legislation as landings or take offs on the runway.

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Effectively, the cap of 80 aircraft movements per hour is underpinned by a slot management system that schedules the movement times of aircraft at the gates in order to achieve an orderly flow of aircraft departures and arrivals consistent with the cap. Legislated slot management and compliance schemes outline the business rules for slot allocation and enforcement mechanisms for slot compliance. The allocation of slots is required to be consistent with the movement cap and the curfew, grandfather rights for airlines operating a minimum 80% of their allocated slots is also a primary feature.

NSW regional services are further restricted having been capped at 2001 levels to discourage the use of smaller aircraft at KSA. Over the past two years there have been frequent calls from local, state and federal elected officials and from airline operators to ease the restrictions on regional access to KSA. The current settings are thought to be negatively impacting social and economic benefits for NSW regional communities while also reducing competition.

Additional capacity at KSA is increasingly scarce during the peak and shoulder periods on weekdays. Currently, there are little or no available slots between 07:00-10:00 and 17:00-20:00. It is widely acknowledged there will be no new capacity available into the future and pressure on the demand management arrangements will continue to increase as demand at KSA increases.

The movement cap also impedes the ability of air traffic controllers, the airport and airline operators to recover to normal scheduled operations when unforeseen disruptions due to weather or other events arise. No exemption from the cap exists to assist airlines when disruptions occur, causing additional complications for operators beyond the disruption itself to restore operations to schedule.

You have indicated there is unlikely to be parliamentary support for increasing the movement cap. The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is revising a range of proposals for your consideration to ease the restrictions on regional services. However, changes to the legislative instruments will be required to achieve tangible improvements for the industry and will require bi-partisan support along with public consultation.

### *Regional Pricing*

At the time of the sale of KSA in 2002, arrangements were put in place to ensure affordability of aeronautical charges for NSW regional services. Through the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* the Government continues to ensure that regional services remain affordable and restrictions on charges on aeronautical services and facilities continue at KSA.

### *Regional Aviation Security Initiatives*

The Australian Government has been working on a number of policy initiatives and programs in recent years to ensure that regional and remote Australian airports are able to respond to a security incident.

### *Regional and Remote Aviation Security Programs*

Under the Regional Passenger Screening Program (RPSP), the Government spent about \$10 million from 2004 to 2015 to provide training in the use of hand-held metal detectors (HHMDs) to staff at remote airports. An evaluation of the RPSP reported that, although security awareness was important, there was limited value in continuing to equip and train staff in the use of HHMDs. Armidale Airport participated in the RPSP up to 2009/10.

In October 2015, the then Minister agreed to refocus the funding to provide security awareness training at all security-controlled regional and remote airports. In 2016/17, the Government provided \$974,000 for aviation security enhancements related to regional and remote airports security awareness. Funding has been allocated over the forward estimates until 2019/20.

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About \$130,000 in funding was spent in 2015/16 to develop a new security awareness training package for regional and remote airports. The training aims to embed security awareness into day-to-day airport operations and ensure that staff are prepared for a security or emergency incident. The learning modules were sent to 158 regional and remote airports in February 2017.

A New Policy Proposal would be required for the refocussed RPSP funding to be used for a purpose other than security awareness training for regional and remote airports.

### *Strengthening Aviation Security Initiative (SASI)*

The Government provided \$12 million between July 2010 and June 2014 to assist with the introduction of security screening equipment at 22 regional Australian airports. Regulatory changes introduced during this time required these airports to introduce security screening for all aircraft with a maximum take-off weight over 20,000kg. The funding was used to acquire metal detectors, explosive trace detectors and X-ray machines for screening carry-on and checked baggage.

Armidale, which is a Category 6 (small, low risk) airport, did not receive program funding.

### *Airport Categorisation*

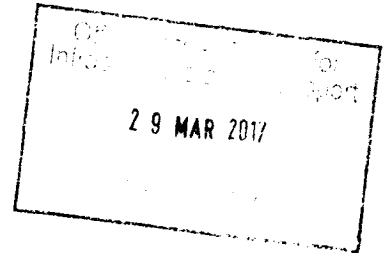
In response to industry concerns about the cost and inflexibility of the current 'one size fits all' approach to security regulation, the department is reviewing the current airport categorisation approach (this work is in the early stages). Although screening arrangements vary across airports, the majority of aviation security regulations apply uniformly across all security controlled airports irrespective of size, operations or location.

An initial discussion paper was provided to aviation industry forums in March 2017, seeking feedback on possible revised categorisation thresholds and where existing regulated airport security arrangements could be adapted to better reflect the security risks and significant operational diversity across Australian airports. The approach being discussed with industry considers factors such as passenger numbers, flight operations and airport location. The current airport categorisation model is inflexible, and requires airports to having screening in place if there are scheduled passenger flights of >20,000kg MTOW (with passenger numbers as a secondary determinant).

Your Office was recently provided a briefing on this matter (MS17-000534 refers).



**The Hon Andrew Constance MP**  
Minister for Transport and Infrastructure



The Hon Darren Chester MP  
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister *Darren*

I write to you regarding the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into Regional Aviation Services. As you may be aware, the NSW Standing Committee on State Development inquired into and reported on a range of issues concerning regular public transport air services to regional centres in NSW. The Inquiry Report is available through the NSW Parliament website at [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au).

A number of the matters considered by the Committee are regulated by the Australian Government including the pricing of services, the movement cap and the allocation of slots to regional services at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, and the safety of civil aviation services. The Committee's recommendations in relation to these matters are attached for your consideration.

In line with the Committee's recommendations regarding access to Sydney Airport, we are seeking a review of the current slot allocation and movement caps at Sydney Airport, including removing the 15 minute movement cap, and removing turboprop air craft from the movement cap.

As you would be aware, the NSW Government supports better utilisation of the existing infrastructure through increasing the movement cap from 80 to 85 movements per hour during peak periods, and increasing movements in the curfew shoulder to the level allowed by the *Sydney Airport Curfew Act 1995*.

The NSW Government recognises the value of air transport services to our regional communities, and strongly supports maintaining convenient access to Sydney by air. As such, the NSW Government does not support any change to protections for existing regional flights, that is the Permanent Regional Service Series.

The Committee made a further recommendation in relation to the allocation of slots at Sydney Airport as it was sympathetic to the suggestions from local communities that regional slots at Sydney Airport be owned by the communities they are intended to service. The Committee was of the view that investigating this option has merit, particularly the potential to allocate a certain number of the reserved regional slots to communities with regulated air routes and allowing those communities to negotiate with an airline to use the slot.

We ask you to assess the potential to adopt the Committee's recommended approach to slot allocation, that is allocating a limited number of the reserved regional slots into Sydney Airport to specific regional communities.

In relation to price regulation at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, we encourage your Government to consider extending the scope of the current price regulation to include other aviation services such as hangar space, airline office space, storage facilities in order to provide certainty to NSW's regional aviation industry.

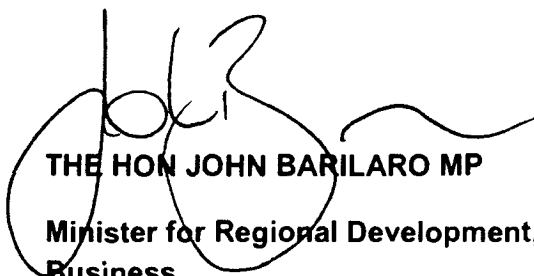
The NSW Government also notes the concerns of regional airports with regard to changes to civil aviation safety legislation. We encourage the Australian Government to consider the impact of changes to security and safety regulations on regional airports and offer funding support for any regulatory changes that require updates to airport infrastructure.

Ms Jessica Linsell, Principal Manager Transport Services Policy at Transport for NSW is the relevant contact should your office have any questions. Ms Linsell may be reached on (02) 8265 6812 or via email [jessica.linsell@transport.nsw.gov.au](mailto:jessica.linsell@transport.nsw.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**THE HON ANDREW CONSTANCE MP**



**THE HON JOHN BARILARO MP**

**Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Skills, and Minister for Small Business**

## **THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES.**

### **RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, to encourage the expansion of the current Declaration 93, made under subsection 95X of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth) to include pricing for other Sydney Airport services, including hangar space, airline office space, storage facilities, and other infrastructure used by regional airlines.

#### Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development to encourage a review of the current slot allocation and movements cap systems in place at Sydney Airport, which should include eliminating the 15 minute movement cap and the removal of regional turboprop aircraft from the movements cap.

#### Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development and request that the Federal Government consider the possibility of allocating a limited number of the reserved regional slots into Sydney Airport to specific regional communities.

#### Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government in its correspondence with the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development urge the Federal Government to amend the Sydney Airport Demand Act 1997 to ensure the access of regional regular passenger transport services to Sydney Airport is preserved.

#### Recommendation 8



That the NSW Government write to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure to note the concerns of regional airports that they are overburdened and overwhelmed by the frequent changes to civil aviation safety legislation and regulations.

Furthermore, the committee recommends that the NSW Government urges the Minister to consider the impact of security and safety regulations on regional airports and encourage the adoption of a risk management approach.

The Minister will also be asked to provide funding to support regulatory change that requires upgrades to be made to infrastructure.



# The Sydney Morning Herald

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## Scrap the cap at Sydney Airport so regional NSW towns aren't cut off

Andrew Constance

Published: October 21, 2016 - 12:36AM

Scrapping the cap on small planes at Sydney Airport will keep our regions connected, and ensure those living on the coast or in the bush have fair access to essential services.

Moree GP Les Woollard this week put a human face to the problem – air services to our regions are drying up, sick people face losing access to specialists in Sydney and communities face airport-mandated isolation.

It is time for Federal Parliament to show leadership and relax the cap for regional planes at Sydney Airport. In doing so, they must lock in iron clad rules that mean any increase to the cap is reserved solely for regional services, to stop airports shunting regional planes for massive jets.

It is clear from plummeting service numbers that regional air passengers are getting a raw deal. We can fix this by getting off regional airlines' backs.

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said the problem will be fixed when the new Western Sydney Airport is open. Asking regional people to wait a decade for a solution when Parliament can fix this now is not good enough. Both Infrastructure Minister Darren Chester and opposition infrastructure spokesman Anthony Albanese have the ability to change lives.

Shirking this chance will isolate our regions, and send a message that the votes of inner city elites mean more than letting people like Dr Woollard's patients access essential medical care. We need leadership, we need a decision and we need an amendment to the law that will boost the number of planes flying in and out of country NSW. We are not talking about 747s flying over Anthony Albanese's electorate – these are quiet, small planes that will not contribute to noise pollution.

With our aim of declaring all intrastate air routes deregulated by the end of the year, the NSW government is doing what it can to increase competition, reduce barriers for new entrants to the market and reduce costs to passengers. We've also pumped \$96 million into upgrading regional airports.

Improving regional air travel is vital to providing health, education and employment benefits that regional NSW is crying out for. But we can't do this alone. The Federal Parliament and Sydney Airport Corporation now have to come to the table and work with us to figure out a better way to land and launch more planes to our regions.

It is a matter of better management of the slots available, or increasing the hourly cap on movements from 80 to 85, with regional services getting exclusive use of the extra spots. And these extra five slots must forever remain for the exclusive use of regional routes.

Regional NSW should not have to cop a 10 per cent fall in slots since 2001, a loss of 42 slots a day. Every regional community depends on its airport, and the way the legislation stands, there is inadequate protection to stop regional slots being transferred to services flying to big cities. In fact, airports have a perverse incentive to dump regional flights because they get paid per passenger, not per plane.

This is now a matter of equity. Does our federal government want to stand by and watch regional communities lose access to services, employment and education? And unless Canberra thinks it's fair that it is cheaper to fly in some cases internationally than some parts of regional NSW, they have no choice but to back this in.

**Andrew Constance is NSW Transport Minister.**

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/scrap-the-cap-at-sydney-airport-so-regional-nsw-towns-arent-cut-off-20161020-gs63va.html>*



DRAMA: NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce have traded barbs about regional slots into Sydney Airport, which many bush MPs, like Kevin Anderson have been pushing had for.

Barnaby Joyce has wiped his hands of Tamworth airport's struggle to get more flights into Sydney, saying his portfolio had no oversight of the laws governing aircraft slots at Sydney Airport.

The comments put him at odds with regional state MPs – including Tamworth MP Kevin Anderson – who have been pushing hard for more regional slots into Kingsford Smith Airport.

The stoush started when NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance called on the federal government to alter the Sydney Airport Demand Management Act to allow for extra slots to be set aside for regional aircraft.

Mr Constance told the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Monday that Mr Joyce had been obstinate on the issue and was “completely and utterly out of touch on what is required to drive regional aviation opportunities”.

“All Canberra have to do is amend the Sydney Airport Management Act and give those additional slots and it will be really beneficial,” he said

“Barnaby Joyce quite frankly has his head in the sand.”

But Mr Joyce, the federal Agriculture and Water Resources Minister, hit back at his state colleague, saying Mr Constance would "do well to realise" that his ministry had no oversight of the laws governing aircraft slots at Sydney Airport.

"I've not received a word from this person, not a letter, not so much as a phone call – in fact, I wouldn't know him if he stood up in my cornflakes," Mr Joyce said.

Mr Anderson, who refused to talk to *The Leader*, met with Mr Joyce in October (<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/4234462/fruitful-talks-on-city-slot-problem/?cs=12>) to discuss the ongoing issue after Virgin Australia announced it would cut its Tamworth to Sydney night-time flights from six times a week to three due to new allocations into Sydney airport.



CRISIS TALKS: Federal Transport Minister Darren Chesterfield, Kevin Anderson and Barnaby Joyce met in October to discuss the problem.

In September (<http://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/4197178/new-airport-a-solution/>), Mr Joyce told *The Leader* he would back Mr Anderson in calling for a solution to the problem.

At the time, Mr Joyce suggested reducing the time between flights and extending the curfew at airports as possible solutions.

Barwon MP Kevin Humphries doesn't believe adding additional slots for large regional centres like Tamworth, Wagga Wagga and Dubbo would help the majority of country NSW.



Mr Humphries said the government needed to look further afield to rural communities such as Inverell, Moree and Narrabri.

"If they want more flights into Sydney, they need to tie it together with servicing those communities and push it out more broadly," Mr Humphries said.





28 Mar 2017

Northern Daily Leader, Tamworth NSW

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# Cloud over slots fight

**JAMIESON MURPHY**

BARNABY Joyce is open to changing federal legislation to let more regional flights into Sydney Airport as suggested by the NSW government – but can't comment on a proposal he or his colleagues has yet to see.

Last week, NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance lashed out at the Deputy Prime Minister for ignoring his proposal to fix the ongoing struggle the state's small airports face to get a landing slot into Sydney.

Mr Constance wants to see the hourly cap of slots into Sydney Airport increased from 80 to 85, and quarantine those additional five extra slots for regional flights. To do this, the federal government must alter the Sydney Airport Management Act.

A spokeswoman for Mr Joyce said access for regional NSW communities to Sydney Airport was a key priority.

"However neither the Deputy Prime Minister, nor the minister responsible, have received any correspondence from the NSW government on this proposal

and we encourage the NSW Government to at least make the issue a priority," she said.

"We are always open to consider proposals to amend aspects of the demand man-

agement arrangements at Sydney Airport.

"Any modification to the current demand management framework would require legislative amendment through both houses."

Last week, Mr Constance told the *Sydney Morning Herald* the Deputy Prime Minister had been obstinate on the issue and was "completely and utterly out of touch on what is required to drive regional aviation opportunities".

"Barnaby Joyce quite frankly has his head in the sand," he said.

But Mr Joyce, the federal Agriculture and Water Resources Minister, hit back at his state colleague, saying Mr Constance would "do well to realise" that his ministry had no oversight of the laws governing aircraft slots at Sydney Airport.

"I've not received a word from this person, not a letter, not so much as a phone call –

in fact, I wouldn't know him if he stood up in my cornflakes," Mr Joyce said.

Mr Joyce's spokeswoman said the Coalition already supported regional NSW access to Sydney Airport through previous changes to the Sydney Airport Slot Management Scheme in 2001 and long-standing pric-

ing protections for regional airlines. "It was the Coalition which capped these pricing protections at 2002 levels in May last year," she said.



Neither the Deputy Prime Minister, nor the minister responsible, have received any correspondence from the NSW government on this proposal.

**Spokeswoman for Barnaby Joyce**



28 Mar 2017

Northern Daily Leader, Tamworth NSW

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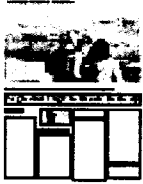
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**PITCH PROPOSAL:** Barnaby Joyce, pictured at Tamworth Airport, said he is open to ideas - but he and his cabinet colleagues need to hear them in detail first.





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Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney

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**Aviation** Ministers at odds over peak-hour cap at Sydney Airport

# Regional flights tussle heats up

**Matt O'Sullivan**  
Transport

NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance is locked in a standoff with the Turnbull government over relaxing a cap for regional aircraft at Sydney Airport during peak hours, accusing Nationals leader Barnaby Joyce of "being completely obstinate".

In an escalation of his tussle with Canberra, Mr Constance said NSW was spending \$100 million on upgrading regional airports yet the federal government was unwilling to follow suit to improve air services to towns in the bush by amending legislation.

He wants the federal government to alter the Sydney Airport Demand Management Act to allow for extra slots to be set aside for regional aircraft.

A state parliamentary inquiry recommended more than two years ago that the federal government improve access to Australia's busiest airport for regional planes

by relaxing the cap on landings or takeoffs for small, turboprop aircraft. Mr Constance, the Liberal MP for Bega in NSW's south-east, said Mr Joyce had been obstinate on the issue and was "completely and utterly out of touch on what is required to drive regional aviation opportunities".

"All Canberra have to do is amend the Sydney Airport Management Act and give those additional slots and it will be really beneficial. Barnaby Joyce quite frankly has his head in the sand," Mr Constance said.

But Mr Joyce, the federal Agriculture and Water Resources

Minister, hit back, saying Mr Constance would "do well to realise" that his ministry had no oversight of the laws governing aircraft slots

at Sydney Airport.

"I've not received a word from this person, not a letter, not so much as a phone call - in fact, I wouldn't know him if he stood up in my cornflakes," Mr Joyce said.

The latest barbs come several weeks after the pair traded blows on the issue over local radio.

Mr Constance has shown a willingness to prod the Turnbull government and last week called for it to be "brave and get on with some real reform" on matters such as housing affordability, industrial relations and tax.

Federal Transport Minister Darren Chester said the government was willing to consider proposals to amend aspects of the slot arrangements at Sydney Airport but it was also committed to protecting the community against aircraft noise.

"If the NSW ministers think they have answers to the complex legislative arrangements concerning Sydney Airport traffic, I'm happy to work with them," he said.

Virgin Australia has been the strongest proponent of a relaxation of the cap at Sydney Airport for regional planes during peak hours, arguing its ability to boost services to Tamworth or launch new routes to Dubbo and Wagga Wagga has been thwarted.

Virgin chief executive John Borghetti said significant benefits for regional NSW could be realised through simple changes to the legislation regarding slots at Sydney Airport.

"It is regrettable for the federal government to suggest that enhanced air access and competition for regional NSW is effectively closed until Western Sydney Air-

port is opened in a decade's time," Mr Borghetti said.

However, any increase to the movement cap will be highly contentious in Sydney's inner-city suburbs under flight paths.



Virgin's John Borghetti wants the cap on regional aircraft relaxed.