



15 February 2022

The Hon Barnaby Joyce  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Leader of the Nationals/ Member for New England

CC: The Treasury  
Via email: [prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au](mailto:prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au)

Dear Mr Joyce

### **Budget support measures for regional aviation**

The Regional Aviation Association of Australia (RAAA) which represents most of Australia's leading regional aviation organisations as well as a large number of aviation support businesses, are writing to you to seek your ongoing support for our regional aviation industry.

The regional aviation industry has managed to survive the Covid pandemic thanks mainly to the unprecedented support from the Australian Federal government. Over \$2 billion in support has found its way to ensure our aviation industry has been able to remain viable in these incredibly difficult times. Whilst our regional airlines in some areas have maintained strong passenger volumes, such as FIFO destinations, we are still seeing a large number of thinner regional routes just scraping by and only thanks to the RANS program. Whilst there has been less government-imposed travel restrictions and borders have been opening up, the travelling public have failed to return to air travel, concerned about impacts if contracting Covid or being identified as a high-risk close contact. In effect, the aviation industry has seen a shadow lockdown which has had the same crippling effect as actual lockdowns had.

The RAAA represents Australia's largest and smallest regional airlines, we are very concerned for some regional centres who will ultimately lose aviation services once the RANS program ceases on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2022. Some regional airlines will not be in any position to continue operating some routes without the government financial support measures thus resulting in a number of remote or regional towns losing vital air services. The RAAA would like to see the Federal Government provide ongoing support through the RANS program until such time that the effects of the Covid pandemic are no longer having damaging impacts.

The RAAA also supports a number of measures identified by the Australian Airports Association (AAA) in their recent submission for the budget process. In particular the request for continuation of support for security screening costs. Now is not the time to lug security screening costs on our regional aviation industry, these costs will inevitably have to be covered by ticket prices, this is not what our nation needs now if we want to see our aviation industry bounce back. Regional airport security screening costs are disproportionately higher than their main city airports due to smaller passenger numbers per flight. This unbalanced cost will potentially see some regional routes becoming unviable as increased ticket prices will see passenger numbers drop.



We appreciate that the government has extended the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program for another 4 years and \$15 million but the extension of the RAP came with no new money, this needs to be rectified to support our regional airports on essential projects to ensure not only the safety of the operations on the field but also other projects which are of benefit to the users and the airport itself. We support the AAA's request for a further \$100 million over the next four years to support these projects.

Skills shortages are also a major problem for regional communities and aviation skills are in even shorter supply, this has also been identified by your Department in the recent Aviation Recovery Framework paper. The paper quoted from the findings of the aviation expert panel which said, "The Expert Panel made a number of recommendations relating to the need to review, streamline and align regulatory pathways and frameworks." Our regions are in critical shortage of licenced engineers and the RAAA would like to see tangible efforts by the government in streamlining Visa processing times, more simplified processes for transferring of licences and a renewed focus on improving training access and costs.

As a regional MP and avid user of regional air travel we hope you will continue to ensure support measures are in place for regional aviation providers. As you know, aviation is not a luxury for regional communities, it is an essential service connecting them to larger cities for business, family and health purposes. Without these air services, any decentralisation policy the Nationals have will never be realised as families will continue to choose the services provided by the larger cities.

Best regards,

**Steven Campbell**

Chief Executive Officer

Regional Aviation Association of Australia

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