

**To:**

**Jessica Shaw MLA**

**Sean L'Estrange MLA**

**Yaz Mubarakai MLA**

**Terry Redman MLA**

*To the committee,*

The high cost of airfares to and from the North West is an important issue which absolutely deserves your attention. I write this submission to share my personal experience and to highlight some of the effects this cost has had on my home town and place I love most, Kununurra.

### **My situation**

I grew up in Kununurra and the cost of airfares was an issue which greatly affected my family's ability to travel outside the region, during both childhood and teenage years as a boarder in Perth.

However, it is my most recent experience which has really hammered this issue home. I spent 4.5 years working in a professional role in Kununurra (2012-2016) and had hoped to stay longer. In February 2016, my father (who lives in Busselton) was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer.

Between February-July, I checked the price of flights almost daily, and battled to find anything below \$750 return which would allow me to travel to Perth before August.

That cost rose to \$1200 at some points. Fortunately, my employer allowed me to work from Perth for four months, (August –November) while my father underwent chemotherapy and radiation. During this time, I did not return to Kununurra to visit my partner, mother or friends because the cost was simply too high.

At the end of my three month stint in Perth, a job came up in the city and I took it. I knew there was just no way I would be able to afford to travel Perth-Kununurra to visit my dad on a regular basis.

### **My travel experiences**

During my 4.5 years in Kununurra, I flew overseas twice, and to Perth approximately 2x a year.

Kununurra's closest 'centres' are Broome, Darwin and Perth. Let's have a look at the one way cost of flying to those places (which are Kununurra residents' portals for flying overseas, to the east coast).

*\*these figures are based on my own observations while living in Kununurra\**

#### **Perth-Kununurra (one way) (3,211km) (3 hour flight)**

\$250 on sale, \$370 average, and \$800-1300 at peak (this high end of the scale is not uncommon)

#### **Darwin-Kununurra (one way) (827km) (50 minute flight)**

\$200 on sale, \$250-300 average, and \$500-600 at peak

### **Broome-Kununurra (one way) (1043km) (1 hour flight)**

\$200 on sale, \$250-300 average, and \$500-600 at peak

It is incredibly expensive to leave or visit Kununurra. As a resident, I was far less inclined to travel anywhere which wasn't within driving distance – an 827km trip to Darwin wasn't uncommon.

During my time in Kununurra, I regularly avoided travelling because of the high cost. I was not making a large wage, and already battling the high cost of living in the region – food, fuel and rent is all considerably more expensive than other parts of WA.

Sure, there are airline sales, and I have absolutely nabbed a \$500 return trip to Perth (yes, that's the ground-breaking sale price!) but this usually means flights must be booked 8-9 months in advance.

### **What are the implications?**

Kununurra is a strong centre for tourism, agriculture, resources, government, and business. The high cost of airfares is stifling the economy, limiting the town's growth potential, and deterring people from moving to the region. It is also having a large-scale, negative effect on current residents.

### **Social cost**

It is disappointing and depressing to be unable to visit friends and family, or take a holiday, because of the cost. When my dad was diagnosed, I faced the awful reality of either forking out thousands of dollars to visit him, or moving to Perth. While living in Kununurra, I found myself isolated from Perth friends and family, unable to attend special events including birthdays and weddings. Everyone in the region faces this choice, and many choose to pack up and leave instead of forking out thousands.

It is not uncommon to hear of a family of four paying \$6000 to visit the east coast. Last Christmas, I paid \$1100 for return flights to Kununurra so I could visit my mum – that was her present.

### **Economic cost**

I believe I am just one of hundreds of people that dearly love the Kimberley, but have (or will) eventually leave the region, chasing better economic prospects and a lower cost of living elsewhere. Many people see Kununurra as a short term place to live due to its high cost (including airfares) and its remote location. As I approach my late 20s and start to consider where I might like to buy property and raise a family, Kununurra was a very expensive option. The Kimberley is losing so many high-quality professionals, community members and volunteers because it simply costs so much to live in the region. This absolutely includes the high cost of flying in and out of the region.

In addition, businesses are suffering. Tourism is vastly impacted by this cost and the Kimberley struggles to capture short-stay visitors and low-budget or young travellers. Why would a tourist pay \$550-1100 to fly to Kununurra for the weekend, when they could fly to Bali for \$129?

During my time in Kununurra, I also found it incredibly difficult to access professional development to further my skills and career. All of the conferences, workshops and talks I would love to attend were in major cities and it was simply too much money to fly and attend, on my low wage.

### **Why do flights cost so much?**

Part of the problem airlines face is airport landing fees. In April 2016, the cost of landing a plane at Kununurra Airport was slashed after a campaign by the town's four local aviation companies.

The groups submitted a proposal to the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley to show the high cost of landing in Kununurra as compared to other airports. Figures showed that of all Australian airports a plane might land at, Kununurra was the most expensive municipally-owned airport, bar seven remote Aboriginal communities in the Top End, eclipsing airports at other remote communities, towns and cities. Charges at Kununurra had increased 45 per cent in three years, from \$20 a tonne in 2013 to \$29 per tonne in 2016.

The Shire opted to return the charge to \$20 a tonne; however the cost of flights did not change. Before the cut, charges were 56 per cent higher than Broome, 95 per cent higher than Derby, and up to 147 per cent higher than some other local government airports in Australia.

Other issues raised include a lack of competition leading to 'price gouging' residents.

I also understand airlines have raised concern about being unable to fill seats, but it poses the question that surely if the seats were cheaper, more people would fly?

### **Conclusion**

The phrase "the Kimberley would be a much better place to live if it was a bit easier to get out" is repeated almost more than "it's hot", which, if you've been to the region, is a lot.

I write this submission someone who holds the Kimberley very close to my heart and wants to see the region (and its residents) prosper. I would love to be able to return home more often.

Thank you for holding this inquiry and I sincerely hope something comes out of it.

I would absolutely welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Thank you,

Cally Dupe

Airport	Year	Airport & Year	Rate	Discount	Total Rate
Kununurra	2014	Kununurra 2014	\$19.09	\$0.00	19.09
Kununurra	2016	Kununurra 2016	\$26.36	\$0.00	26.36
Wyndham	2014	Wyndham 2014	\$19.09	\$0.00	19.09
Wyndham	2016	Wyndham 2016	\$26.36	\$0.00	26.36
Broome	2014	Broome 2014	\$16.88	\$5.63	22.51
Broome	2016	Broome 2016	\$16.88	\$5.63	22.51
Albury	2014	Albury 2014	\$11.18	\$0.00	11.18
Albury	2016	Albury 2016	\$12.36	\$0.00	12.36
Armidale	2014	Armidale 2014	\$7.67	\$0.00	7.67
Armidale	2016	Armidale 2016	\$10.00	\$0.00	10
Bathurst	2014	Bathurst 2014	\$6.36	\$0.00	6.36
Bathurst	2016	Bathurst 2016	\$7.00	\$0.00	7
Ceduna	2014	Ceduna 2014	\$13.35	\$0.00	13.35
Ceduna	2016	Ceduna 2016	\$13.97	\$0.00	13.97
Coffs Harbour	2014	Coffs Harbour 2014	\$8.18	\$0.00	8.18
Coffs Harbour	2016	Coffs Harbour 2016	\$8.63	\$0.00	8.63
Derby	2014	Derby 2014	\$0.00	\$0.00	0
Derby	2016	Derby 2016	\$7.26	\$0.00	7.26
Dubbo	2014	Dubbo 2014	\$9.91	\$0.00	9.91
Dubbo	2016	Dubbo 2016	\$10.41	\$0.00	10.41
Elcho Island	2014	Elcho Island 2014	\$9.09	\$0.00	9.09
Elcho Island	2016	Elcho Island 2016	\$15.00	\$0.00	15
Esperance	2014	Esperance 2014	\$9.09	\$0.00	9.09
Esperance	2016	Esperance 2016	\$10.45	\$0.00	10.45
Fitzroy Crossing	2014	Fitzroy Crossing 2014	\$0.00	\$0.00	0
Fitzroy Crossing	2016	Fitzroy Crossing 2016	\$7.26	\$0.00	7.26
Gove	2014	Gove 2014	\$15.00	\$0.00	15
Gove	2016	Gove 2016	\$15.00	\$0.00	15
Groote Eylandt	2014	Groote Eylandt 2014	\$10.00	\$0.00	10
Groote Eylandt	2016	Groote Eylandt 2016	\$10.00	\$0.00	10
Kalumburu	2014	Kalumburu 2014	\$0.00	\$0.00	0
Kalumburu	2016	Kalumburu 2016	\$6.91	\$0.00	6.91
Kingscote	2014	Kingscote 2014	\$17.00	\$0.00	17
Kingscote	2016	Kingscote 2016	\$18.18	\$0.00	18.18
Leigh Creek	2014	Leigh Creek 2014	\$7.00	\$0.00	7
Leigh Creek	2016	Leigh Creek 2016	\$7.00	\$0.00	7
Mount Gambier	2014	Mount Gambier 2014	\$7.00	\$0.00	7
Mount Gambier	2016	Mount Gambier 2016	\$7.00	\$0.00	7
Newman	2014	Newman 2014	\$9.99	\$0.00	9.99
Newman	2016	Newman 2016	\$10.69	\$0.00	10.69
Port Lincoln	2014	Port Lincoln 2014	\$8.10	\$0.00	8.1
Port Lincoln	2016	Port Lincoln 2016	\$8.10	\$0.00	8.1
Port Macquarie	2014	Port Macquarie 2014	\$9.64	\$0.00	9.64
Port Macquarie	2016	Port Macquarie 2016	\$10.09	\$0.00	10.09
Rockhampton	2014	Rockhampton 2014	\$4.00	\$0.00	4
Rockhampton	2016	Rockhampton 2016	\$5.10	\$0.00	5.1
Telfer	2014	Telfer 2014	\$15.00	\$0.00	15
Telfer	2016	Telfer 2016	\$15.00	\$0.00	15
Toowoomba	2014	Toowoomba 2014	\$10.00	\$0.00	10
Toowoomba	2016	Toowoomba 2016	\$11.36	\$0.00	11.36
William Creek	2014	William Creek 2014	\$10.00	\$0.00	10
William Creek	2016	William Creek 2016	\$10.00	\$0.00	10

\*discount applies if bill is paid within 30 days

\*\*Broome Discount only applies to Broome based operators