




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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ADJOURNMENT

Western Queensland Regulated Airports

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.50 pm): I wish to draw the attention of the House to the way the Queensland government is allowing airlines to exploit the government's monopoly contracts in Western Queensland's regulated airports. These monopoly contracts shelter the airline from competition and are meant to ensure that people living in Queensland's more remote areas can afford to travel to Brisbane when they need to. They may be called regulated airports, but a quick scan or a look at the fare structures suggests there is something very irregular happening.

The electorate of Gregory contains three regulated airports in what is called central zone 2. These airports are Blackall, Longreach and Barcaldine. Under the terms of the contract the airline is supposed to provide a so-called resident's fare. Obviously this is intended for local residents rather than tourists. The Longreach-Brisbane resident's fare is \$170 one way. The problem is that the carrier seems to limit the number of seats available at that price. Actually getting a seat for the resident's fare is a very rare experience. In addition to the resident's fare, the airline also puts on periodic specials. If you score one of these you can fly from Longreach to Brisbane for \$119. Again, these are as rare as hen's teeth and can be hedged around with conditions. The normal experience is that people pay just under \$500 for a one-way trip from Longreach to Brisbane. That puts air travel out of the question for many residents, family groups, seniors and wage earners.

When one starts comparing actual prices on available seats for Longreach-Brisbane with the cost to other destinations the story gets even more irregular. Today I could have flown from Longreach to Brisbane for \$480 one way. At the cheaper fare of \$413 the same carrier was happy to take me from Longreach to Melbourne! This Thursday, 3 November, it will still cost me \$480 one way from Longreach to Brisbane, but they will take me from Longreach to Melbourne even cheaper at \$363.99. What is going on here? Is the contract now sponsored by Tourism Victoria? What about those cunning Kiwis? If I wait until 7 November I will be able to fly Longreach-Auckland for \$469—still cheaper than flying from Longreach to my own state capital.

I call on the Minister for Transport to investigate this because residents of the Central West are fed up. While the contracts require the carrier that benefits from its monopoly at these airports to undertake consultations, these are apparently by invitation only. There is never a genuine attempt to hold a public meeting. Some of the questions the minister could ask on their behalf include: how many seats per annum are available for the resident's fare price and what is the basis for the size of the allocation as a percentage of total flights and as a reflection of population; what proof of residency is required for someone to purchase a seat on a resident's fare; how far ahead must a resident book to get these fares; why is it cheaper to fly to Auckland or Melbourne than it is to fly from Longreach to Brisbane; and what is the pricing strategy that creates this disparity? The minister needs to look into this strange situation in these regulated, monopoly airports which is causing hardship for Western Queenslanders. The lack of transparency and accountability guarantees it will continue.