



To: Electoral Districts Redistribution Panel/ NSW Electoral Commission

Re: Proposal to Transfer Lord Howe Island to the Sydney electoral district

Executive Statement

The Eastern Air Services Pty Ltd Group (EAS Group) of companies, specifically it's airline company, Eastern Air Link Pty Ltd **strongly opposes the proposal** to transfer Lord Howe Island from the electoral district of Port Macquarie to Sydney as referenced at points #78 and #79 in the '*Report of the Electoral Districts Redistribution Panel on the draft determination of the names and boundaries of electoral districts of New South Wales*' - dated 9th November 2020 (the Report).

Unfortunately and inadvisably, 'the Report' has centered its proposal on totally incorrect and outdated information, which if acted upon, may lead to a negative outcome for the residents of Lord Howe Island.

The fact is that QantasLink is NOT the sole RPT operator to Lord Howe Island (the Island) nor is regular air service connectivity restricted to Sydney. Eastern Air Link Pty Ltd (EAL) operates an established Regular Public Transport (RPT) service between Port Macquarie and the Island moreover, the flight time between the Island and Port Macquarie is just one hour - half that of a flight to Sydney.

Support from both the Lord Howe Island Board and personal contact with the sitting member, the Hon. L Williams MP has been essential to the successful, 4 year development of EAL's endeavors.

Given the current MP's location in Port Macquarie, there is absolutely no requirement to first fly to Sydney thence Port Macquarie should an Island resident wish to meet with their local member nor do they need to restrict their travel to occur when Parliament is sitting. Likewise, a local MP is not required to fly to Sydney prior to a flight to the Island. Irrespective of the location of the local member, a person-to-person meeting would necessitate an overnight stay and that is likely to be cheaper in Port Macquarie.

The EAS Group is particularly cognisant of the absolute criticality of a regular and reliable air service to the Island and its people. It underpins every endeavor on the Island and the city of Port Macquarie is a key element in the Island future development.

There has always been a strong commercial, social, sustainability and environmental nexus between the Island and Port Macquarie. Both are significant tourist destinations. The proposed transition to the Sydney electorate would not serve the people of either community well.

Although not supported in 2013, the Liberal Party has no objection to this change yet party's interest are now represented by the sitting member in Port Macquarie. The current local member representation works now, so the well-known adage comes to mind; "*if its not broken, don't fix it*"

It is for all the above reasons that it is not on vital but logical that the representative MP for the Island remain in Port Macquarie not be lost in the greater Sydney CBD electorate.

Supporting information and justification argument

The Report referred to in this submission is the '*Report of the Electoral Districts Redistribution Panel on the draft determination of the names and boundaries of electoral districts of New South Wales*' - dated 9th November 2020 (the Report). Specifically sections # 78 and 79 which details a proposal to transfer Lord Howe Island from the electoral district of Port Macquarie to that of Sydney.

1. QantasLink operates the only year round air service to Lord Howe Island and that is to Sydney.

The report states that.... "*the only year-round scheduled services to Lord Howe Island*" is by QantasLink to Sydney and that the service to Port Macquarie is at best, seasonal (point 78). Both statements are incorrect. QantasLink is NOT the only regular air service provider and whereas their air service link to Port Macquarie is at best seasonal (flagged to cease altogether) the connectivity between the Island and Port Macquarie is strong, regular and robust! Furthermore, there are indications within the QantasLink and in the airline industry at large that QantasLink will not seek to renew their Lord Howe Island Licence beyond 2022. To base a redistribution decision predicated on this being the only service to the Island and that it will always be operating is false and may well lead to an outcome that is deleterious to the population and well being of the Island.

2. Port Macquarie – Lord Howe Island air service and the role of Eastern Air Services Group

The Eastern Air Services Group (EAS) is locally based in Port Macquarie and has demonstrated a holistically commitment to the welfare of the Island and its people. Through its wholly owned airline company, Eastern Air Link Pty Ltd (EAL) it has supported Lord Howe Island since the latter days of 2016 when CASA granted it a Charter Licence which enabled bi-weekly delivery of freight and charter passengers to the island. Following on from this success, in 2019, CASA authorised EAL to commence Regular Public Transports (RPT) services between the two locations.

The airline currently operates three RPT return services per week between the Island and Port Macquarie and has plans to introduce a daily service in the near future in response to passenger demands. This has continued albeit somewhat restricted due to the impact of Covid 19 and the constraints of the Health Directives affecting aviation activity to/from the island. Nevertheless, EAL consistently maintained a regular air service throughout the Covid 19 period and, when travel restrictions were lifted in November, the airline commenced services between the Island and Newcastle. Additionally, in the first quarter of 2021 EAL plans to further increase its Island to mainland air services to include the Gold Coast. A current project for EAL is the upgrade of its aircraft fleet to include the Bombardier DASH 8 100 aircraft, of similar size to that operated by QantasLink. (refer to the end of this letter for the artists impression of the proposed EAL DASH 8)

It must be noted that the flight time to Port Macquarie is half that of a flight to Sydney.

In response to strong demand EAL has maintained the weekly freighter service, increasing the frequency as required to meet the requirements of the people of Lord Howe Island and its Board.

The EAS Group has also supported the people of the island through subsidised fares, personal and corporate sponsorships, medivacs to name just a few.

3. The Eastern Air Services Group (EAS) meeting their local member

Continued support from the Islands MP, Ms L Williams MP has been a key factor in the successful development of the EAS Group's development and endeavors thus far, particularly with the expansion of the airline. Because of the EAS Groups commitment to the welfare of the Island generally, the capability to personally meet with and discuss Lord Howe Island matters with its local member cannot be overstated and therefore the EAS Group strongly opposes any proposal to withdraw this facility.

The EAS Group would be negligent if it failed to also acknowledge the huge support it has received from the Lord Howe Island Board.

4. Island residents (constituents) needing to overnight in Sydney to meet their local member

The report states that.... *"constituents flying from Lord Howe Island to meet with their Member of Parliament would need to stay at least overnight in Sydney."* (point #79). Incorrect!

Given the RPT airlines connection to Port Macquarie where the current Islands MP is there is absolutely no requirement for a resident wishing to meet the MP to first fly to Sydney or restrict their travel to concur when Parliament is sitting. The resident can fly to Port Macquarie and return directly taking less time in the air and thus circumventing the inherent delays associated with Sydney airport and also avoiding the vagaries of travelling around Sydney seeking reasonable accommodation..

Likewise, a Port Macquarie based local member is not required to fly to Sydney prior to a flight to the Island nor restrict their travel to link with parliamentary sitting weeks. Direct EAL RPT flights to the Island offers a significant reduction in travel time to the Island and it also permits rapid/emergency response capability should that be deemed necessary. It should be noted that the Ms Williams has already availed herself of the EAL service.

5. The importance of Port Macquarie and an efficient air service to Lord Howe Island

The EAS Group is particularly cognisant of the absolute criticality of a regular and reliable air service to the Island and its people. It underpins every endeavor on the Island and the city of Port Macquarie is a key element in the Island future development. As mentioned above, the EAS Group ensured the Port Macquarie – Lord Howe Island air service was consistently maintained throughout the Covid 19 period.

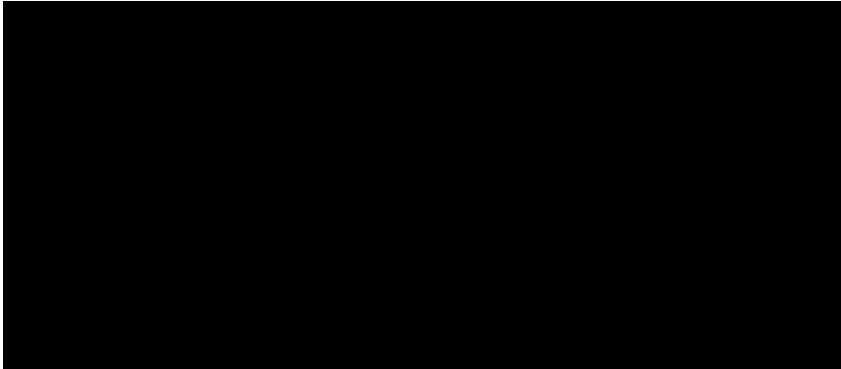
Port Macquarie, being one of the closest significant mainland cities to the Island has always had a very strong social, commercial and environmental connection to the Island and its people. Both are significant tourist destinations and many of the passengers travelling to/from the island are therefore tourists. The other significant passenger groups using the EAL services are locally based trade persons travelling in support of the various needs of Island residents and still, residents themselves hoping over for personal and business reasons. Island residents have strong bonds to Port Macquarie as their electorate and vice versa and so the proposed transition to the Sydney electorate would not serve the people of either community well.

6. Liberal Party representation

A similar proposal was put up in 2013 and at that time the sitting member for Sydney did not support the mover. It is now understood that the sitting member for Sydney has “no objection” to the transition which is not full support. It must be noted that the Liberal Party’s interest are now represented by the sitting member in Port Macquarie. Since the current local member representation works for both the people of Port Macquarie, the Liber Party and the resident of the Island the well-known adage comes to mind “if its not broken, don’t fix it”

7. Conclusion

It is for all the above reasons that it is not only vital but logical that the representative MP for the Island remain in Port Macquarie not be lost in the greater Sydney CBD electorate.



3 December 2020



Artist Impression of EAL DASH 8