



# International passenger flights into Western Australia since 5 February

The two or three largely empty international passenger flights landing at Perth Airport each day are only carrying about 70 passengers in total for either hotel or home quarantine. At the same time, thousands of Western Australian citizens (including those from overseas) and other approved travellers are entering the state each day via domestic flights and home quarantine. The arrangements undermine the commercial viability of international flights into Western Australia, create unnecessary cost and expense for returning citizens, and do not benefit the community by lowering the risk of COVID-19.

The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA)<sup>1</sup> expects international airlines have cancelled or will cancel 70–90% of scheduled passenger flights into Perth Airport over the next two months. The few remaining international airlines that have supported Western Australia throughout the pandemic are being punished commercially under the quarantine arrangements, putting them under considerable, and pointless, commercial strain.

## Hotel and home quarantine options for international arrivals

The Western Australian Government has capped direct international arrivals into the state at 530 passengers per week for either hotel or home quarantine but is allowing uncapped entry for its citizens via other Australian states and territories for home quarantine. As can be expected, most West Australian citizens overseas are now seeking approval for home quarantine and shifting their bookings onto flights into other Australian states and then taking onward domestic flights into Perth Airport.

“International airlines have told BARA the customer feedback they are receiving is that the arrangements are illogical; however, other than for the few passengers permitted to fly directly into Perth Airport for home quarantine, it is cheaper and easier to enter via domestic flights rather than direct international flights and hotel quarantine. For Western Australians overseas, the international border has been reopened to those who can home quarantine; but for the majority it is via a convoluted arrivals journey.

“Hundreds of Western Australian citizens overseas have already shifted their bookings to Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane airports to then take a domestic flight into Perth Airport. Many thousands more are expected to do the same over the coming weeks,” Barry Abrams, Executive Director of BARA said.

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<sup>1</sup> BARA represents 34 airlines, which provide 90% of all international passenger flights and carry most freight to and from Australia.



In justifying these arrangements, a statement emailed by the Western Australian Government argued that:

‘The international arrivals cap and the hotel quarantine regime is in place to protect WA and minimise the risk of importing COVID into the community.’<sup>2</sup>

“Permitting home quarantine at least provides a path home for some of the estimated 20,000 Western Australian citizens overseas. But given the Western Australian Government has permitted entry to some 17,000 people for home quarantine over the first week of the new border arrangements,<sup>3</sup> the weekly cap of 530 direct international arrivals adds nothing to mitigating the risk of COVID-19. Hotel quarantine is also expensive, can be difficult for people to endure, and it is not benefiting the community by lowering the risk of COVID-19,” Mr Abrams said.

### **Commercially punishing international airlines to preserve hotel quarantine**

International airlines have continued to display a high level of professionalism in supporting the Australian, state and territory governments in maintaining critical passenger and freight air transport services throughout the pandemic. Outside Western Australia, this has extended to supporting the arrangements for reopening borders and returning and reuniting tens of thousands of Australian citizens and families.

The reason given for continuing to subject international airlines to the tight international passenger arrival caps and hotel quarantine is to preserve the small amount of hotel quarantine capacity. As stated by the Western Australian Premier:

‘So whilst there are you know, admittedly, some inconsistencies here, the greater good is served by ensuring we have an operational hotel quarantine system in place until such time as the quarantine centre in Bullsbrook is operational.’<sup>4</sup>

“The Western Australian Government’s decision about quarantine arrangements commercially punishes the remaining international airlines operating into Perth Airport by requiring them to operate flights with pitiful numbers of arriving passengers – airlines that have continued to ensure the state’s critical air passenger and freight services operated uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. BARA knows of one international airline that had established direct flights for passengers who qualified for home quarantine, but which has now had to cancel all its flights into Perth Airport.

“BARA is unaware of any other options considered by the Western Australian Government so as to keep its small amount of hotel quarantine capacity. For example, it could contract directly with the hotels to maintain the option for the required capacity should it become necessary to support cases of COVID within the community in the future.

“The commercial viability of international flights into Western Australia is now clearly undermined, which is reflected in the widespread passenger flight cancellations and passengers shifting their bookings into other Australian states. All this highlights how shabbily the Western Australian Government is treating international airlines,” Mr Abrams said. **[ENDS]**

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<sup>2</sup> Emailed response by the WA Government to the media coverage of the revised quarantine arrangements, 27 January 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Arrivals from both other Australian states and territories and international passengers via domestic flights.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in media articles.