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For immediate release

TSRA WELCOMES ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAIRNS TO HORN ISLAND AIR ROUTE DEREGULATION

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has welcomed today's announcement of the deregulation of the Cairns to Horn Island air route by the Queensland Government.

TSRA Chairman, Mr Joseph Elu, said opening the route to competition should result in better services to the Torres Strait and lower fares.

"QantasLink is the only contracted airline operating from Cairns to Horn Island, so opening this route up to more competition can only be a positive for the Torres Strait," Mr Elu said.

"While it is an essential service, it does have its limitations in the number of flights it provides and the costs to travel.

"The flow-on effects of the current situation are felt by people living in the region and also create barriers to increased tourism and economic development."

The route will, according to today's announcement, be opened to commercial competition when the existing contract ends in 2015, allowing the market to set the price and service levels.

Mr Elu said while market forces would dictate the service provided, the region will not accept a lowering of standards following deregulation.

"The Cairns to Horn Island air route currently provides 17 return flights a week carrying 67,000 passengers a year," Mr Elu said.

"This provides a substantial business case for new operators to enter the market and I would expect the number of flights and number of seats to increase accordingly.

"I would also expect the size of operating aircraft to be maintained, to give the Torres Strait a true regional air route that will open up the area to many more opportunities."

ENDS

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