

Plight for Direct Flights to Melbourne Continues

- The East Kimberley Marketing Group (EKMG) will continue to negotiate with airlines following the last-minute decision made by Alliance Airlines not to proceed with the service for 2018.
- The airline has cited unexpected terminal costs in Melbourne, delayed upload of fares for distribution, and crew shortages as the key reasons for not proceeding this year.
- All conditions of the Alliance Airlines proposal were met by the EKMG and associated stakeholders to the project.
- The EKMG remains committed to the project and is now focus on commencement of the direct air service in 2019.

After a two-year period of the EKMG working with Alliance Airlines to develop the direct flights between Melbourne and Kununurra, and the East Kimberley Community and State Government Tourism Authority meeting all the conditions of a conditional offer put forward by the airline, Alliance has decided at very late notice to delay the commencement of the service and reconsider for the 2019 tourist season.

This decision has been a great disappointment for the East Kimberley Marketing Group who has worked tirelessly in what is seen as unprecedented cooperation between a Community, Local and State Government, and a commercial airline to see a 20-week direct flight trial commence in 2018 between Kununurra and Melbourne.

The Marketing Group Chair, Michael McConachy said “although the EKMG is bitterly disappointed about the delay in the air service trial, it is determined to ensure the success of direct flights for the long term and if an earlier trial puts the success of the service at risk, the group preferred to focus on a 2019 commencement which would hopefully be locked in with sufficient time to promote and sell the seats”.

The proposal for the 2018 service was quashed recently when Alliance Airlines confirmed that it would not be able to proceed with the trial citing its code-share agreement with an unnamed distribution partner imposing additional terminal charges in Melbourne, the late final investment decision delaying release of seats and fares, and air crew shortages that is having an effect on all regional airlines across the country meaning that the airline may have struggled to crew the new scheduled service.

Vice Chair of the EKMG, Charlie Sharpe, said “It is hoped that the air service can be launched with schedules confirmed well prior to Christmas 2018. A longer lead time on seat availability will better accommodate locals planning trips away and also visitors planning trips to the East Kimberley. Following consultation with the community it is evident that many locals and visitors that might have utilised the service have already pre-booked alternative flights for 2018.”

At its Annual General Meeting in late March, Mr McConachy said “The EKMG has been successful in developing a regionally significant project that has been uniformly supported by the State, Local Government, Tourism Industry, and the Community generally. This is a momentous achievement for a worthwhile project with significant benefits to all sectors of the East Kimberley Community and is one that I would encourage the Group to continue fighting for”.

“I do agree with Alliance and other key stakeholders that we have unfortunately missed the opportunity for 2018 for the direct service, however encourage all involved to stay fully committed to ensuring we secure a 2019 direct air service and associated marketing support in the very near future”.

The EKMG will continue to work with the Shire, State Government and the Community to encourage continued support of the project, and will continue to liaise with Alliance Airlines, as well as other potential airlines, to ensure flights commence in 2019.

END

05 April, 2018