



Community Bulletin

INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES

Number:	D23/2018	Date:	18 May 2018
Relevant:	Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands		
Topic:	Indian Ocean Territories Air Services: Changes to Virgin Australia flight schedules		

On 2 March 2018, the Administrator of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands issued Community Bulletin A10/2018 inviting community feedback by 16 March 2018 on a proposal to change the Virgin Australia flight schedule to the Indian Ocean Territories. The following three options were proposed:

- Option 1 – No change to flight schedule;
- Option 2 – Change Saturday service to Friday, maintain Tuesday service; and
- Option 3 – Change Saturday service to Friday, and Tuesday service to Monday.

In total, between the Administrator's targeted discussions in November 2017 and the wider community feedback process in March 2018, the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (the Department) **received 58 responses** from a range of individual community members, businesses, groups and government agencies.

Thank you all for your constructive feedback. The Department's analysis reviewed each response independently, as well as assessing preferences by community sector: individual community members, tourism and hospitality, other businesses and services, and government agencies (WA and Australian Government).

Of the 58 responses (noting some respondents provided preferences for more than one option):

- 47 responses came from individuals, business and services, and government agencies, and these entities overall preferred Option 2; and
- 11 responses came from the tourism and hospitality sector, and these entities overall preferred Option 1.
- Option 3 was the least preferred by respondents overall.

The Department has carefully considered the impact of each of the options and the feedback provided in all of the responses. Based on this thorough analysis, the Department has assessed that **Option 2 (change Saturday service to Friday, maintain Tuesday service) is the most appropriate outcome**. The Department is now working with Virgin Australia to implement Option 2, **effective from 15 October 2018**.

Formal feedback received during these consultations was limited about the implementation date. The Department understands that, while some members of the community would prefer implementation in January 2019, other community members would prefer implementation in July 2018. To balance the various views, the Department reviewed current passenger bookings to confirm the proposed date of 15 October would have minimal impact on the IOT communities and travelers. As almost 1400 passengers are already booked on Virgin Australia flights between 7 July and 13 October 2018, the Department has confirmed implementation from 15 October remains appropriate.

The Department will advise stakeholders of the new Friday flight times once Virgin Australia has received its new Friday departure timeslot from Perth International Airport.

As advised in the Community Bulletin A10/2018 of 2 March 2018, the new Friday flight will maintain the same direction as the Saturday flight it replaces (i.e. Perth-Learmonth-Cocos (Keeling) Islands-Christmas Island-Perth).

Whilst I appreciate there will not be unanimous support for the change from all sectors of the community, the new flight day will have benefits including improved recovery options if a Friday flight is cancelled and increased confidence for Cocos passengers connecting with the Garuda flight. The lead-time to implementation should assist community members, businesses and service providers with accommodating the change.

Virgin Australia has confirmed all existing Saturday bookings after the implementation date of 15 October will be transferred to the new Friday service at no cost.

Thank you once again for providing your views on this matter. If you require further information on this matter, please contact our Air Services Contract Manager by email:

<IOTAirServices@infrastructure.gov.au>



Karly Pidgeon
General Manager
Indian Ocean Territories Branch