



MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH SHOWS AIRFREIGHT TRADE IS RECOVERING BUT SUPPLY CHAIN TURBULENCE REMAINS

It's not just holidaying Australians that have been navigating complex flight routes and stumping up more for their airfares recently, shows a new report released by industry think tank Infrastructure Partnerships Australia.

Airfreight supply chains are on the flight path to recovery following the worst of the pandemic, but have been hampered by a clunky aviation landscape and limited belly capacity as passenger flights continue their journey to normality.

“Last year an average of 313 international flights departed and arrived in Australia every day. Most passengers wouldn't realise that below their seats they are sharing their flight with a myriad of high value and perishable goods,” said Infrastructure Partnerships Australia Chief Executive, Adrian Dwyer.

Outbound from Australia they might have hidden travel companions like live lobsters and steak, while on the way back home they sit atop high-end machinery and electronics.

“But just like you and I, those high-end goods have endured a more challenging journey than they would have pre-pandemic.

“Australia's airfreight supply chain plays a critical role in the movement of high-value, time-sensitive and perishable goods to and from overseas markets – that belly freight, sat alongside luggage is worth a staggering \$139 billion annually.

“While the numbers are enormous, there has been a material decline in air freight contribution to total trade – largely in part because the belly capacity in planes hasn't yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

“Between 2016 and 2022 the value of total freight trade in and out of the country more than doubled but airfreight fell from 20 to 14 per cent of total trade.

“Farmers from southern Victoria to far north Queensland are facing the conundrum of how to move perishables to their overseas markets as quickly as possible – a challenge that is getting increasingly complex with specific transportation requirements and limited flight options at their closest international port.





“If governments want to capitalise on the economic potential of airfreight trade over the coming decade, we need to shine a much bigger spotlight on the industry in our broader trade debate and freight network planning,” said Mr Dwyer.

The 2023 International Airfreight Indicator can be accessed [here](#).

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia is the nation’s industry think tank providing independent policy research focused on excellence in social and economic infrastructure.

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2023 International Airfreight Indicator – Key Facts

- Australia’s supply chain carried almost 790,000 tonnes of airfreight in 2022 – the equivalent of more than 16 fully loaded 747-8 freighter services every day – reflecting a decrease of 21 per cent or 215,000 tonnes compared to 2019 volumes.
- The average value of airfreight is \$115,000/tonne; 115 times greater than the average value of seafreight. In 2022, airfreight carried \$139 billion worth of goods.
- Australia’s total freight has doubled since 2016 from \$513 billion to \$1 trillion. However, in that time the share of airfreight has decreased from 20 per cent to 14 per cent.
- In terms of airfreight export volumes, Brisbane, Perth, and Melbourne now carry 61, 52, and 48 per cent of their pre-pandemic (2019) volumes respectively. Sydney, on the other hand, carries 99 per cent of its pre-pandemic airfreight export volumes.
- In terms of airfreight import volumes, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Perth now carry 91, 73, and 85 per cent of their pre-pandemic volumes, representing a strong recovery from the initial 2020 COVID-19 drop in freight. Sydney experienced a four per cent growth on its import volumes from 2019 figures.

