



CEMAIR Statement – Plettenberg Bay Airport 24 March 2018

CemAir acknowledges the Updated Press Statement dated 23 March 2018 by Bitou Municipality immediately withdrawing the suspension of CemAir's flights into Plettenberg Bay Airport. The statement follows a meeting held between CemAir and Bitou on 22 March 2018. The statement provides no reason for the withdrawal of the suspension but outlines some agreed actions. Similarly, the "suspension letter" received by CemAir on 14 March 2018 provided no reason for the suspension itself.

Plettenberg Bay Airport is a licensed public airport with Bitou Municipality as the licensee. It is unclear on what legal basis Bitou relied upon when, without notice it suspended the operations of a scheduled airline service to a public facility ostensibly on the basis of a fee dispute. The Municipality's manufactured urgency to act so drastically did not include any attempt to resolve the matter with CemAir nor any consultation with affected or interested public parties such as The Rate Payers Association, Plett Tourism and other community groups. This flies in the face of the philosophies of democracy.

We note the Municipality's mandate to collect revenue and highlight the equally weighted mandate to discharge its obligation of service delivery. CemAir is absolutely willing to pay reasonable fees for the use of the airfield but this cannot be done in addition to paying operational costs that should be paid by the airport licensee to achieve regulatory compliance and basic functionality. The operation of an airport requires ongoing management, administration and investment. The user fees collected need to be used to provide maintenance and upkeep of the facility.

The Bitou Council resolved on 28 February 2018 to invite other commercial airlines to conduct operations to and from Plettenberg Bay Airport. We point out that South Africa has an open skies policy and any airline which is licensed and equipped is free to conduct flights to Plettenberg Bay. Competition laws require that all airlines be offered the same terms. That said, the reality is that Plettenberg Bay is a thin and marginal route and that it is unlikely to support more than one carrier. Bitou would be well guided to nurture what has been built over the last four years with CemAir and do everything in its power to ensure the town does not lose its airline service as was the case for the decade before CemAir's service commenced.

The airline service into Plettenberg Bay has had a profound impact on the economy of the town. It is estimated that more than 100 households have relocated to Plett as a result of the improved connectivity. Tourism has benefited dramatically with increased occupancy levels and the construction of additional accommodation. Building and construction companies in general have seen a marked increase in projects and Estate Agents have recorded record years of sales. As a result, an estimated 700 jobs have been created. The service is a vital utility for the town and key for its continued growth.

We thank the community for the amazing support received over the recent weeks. Our service can only exist with this level of support. As long as there is commercial justification for the service CemAir will remain in Plett and remain a part of the community. These events have highlighted the growing gap between the needs of the community and the decisions being made by the Bitou Municipality. We appeal to everyone to remain vocal on social media, to your ward councillors and directly to the Bitou Municipality to ensure the interests of the town and its people are the priority.

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