PROPSTAR TAKES OFF IN NEW ZEALAND

News / Airlines

Jetstar's New Zealand turboprop operations have taken off with the first regional services getting underway on Tuesday morning.

The Qantas-owned low-cost carrier is taking the fight up to Air New Zealand on regional services with five 50-seat Q300s.

The first two routes – Auckland-Napier and Auckland-Nelson – commenced on Tuesday, with Palmerston North-Auckland, New Plymouth-Auckland and Nelson-Wellington due to begin from February 2016.

Flight JQ350, operated by VH-SBI, took off from Napier just after 0900 local time, landing at Auckland Airport just before 1000, where it was met with a traditional monitor cross salute.

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VH-SBI operated the inaugural Jetstar regional service, from Napier to Auckland. (Mike Millett)

Jetstar Australia and New Zealand chief executive David Hall said the airline had 3,500 passengers due to travel on its turboprop services during the first week of operations, with average load factors at 85 per cent.

Further, Hall said Jetstar had sold 30,000 regional tickets for less than NZ$50 a flight.

“I think if you asked any person who flies regionally in New Zealand they would tell you that they’ve never seen regional air fares as low and readily available as they are now,” Hall said in a statement.

“That’s what choice brings to markets and that’s exactly what Jetstar is all about, stimulating airline travel and competition through lower fares.”

The aircraft will be operated by Qantas-owned Eastern Australia Airlines for Jetstar.

In terms of schedule, Jetstar has said previously aircraft and crew would be positioned overnight at each of its new destinations, meaning the first flight each day would take off from those regional ports.

Moreover, its expansion into regional NZ would add about 670,000 extra seats into the local market, on top of its 2.6 million seats flown by its fleet of nine Airbus A320 jets.

Jetstar said about 150 new pilot, cabin crew and ground staff jobs had been created as a result of the decision to launch regional flights.

Air NZ has said previously it was ready to compete again the new entrant on regional flights.

“We’re quite excited and energised by the opportunity to compete in the regions,” Air NZ chief

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sales and commercial officer Cam Wallace said in the November edition of *Australian Aviation* magazine.

“We think it’s going to be good for customers, good for tourism and actually really good for Air New Zealand as well.

“It’s going to be an interesting battle and we’re well prepared for it.”

Jetstar will have five Q300s based in NZ. (Mike Millett)

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