



# Stop protecting Qantas: Liberals

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WA Liberals are urging the Federal Government to overhaul aviation laws which give Qantas a monopoly on cross-Pacific flights, saying consumers are losing out because the Commonwealth insists on protecting the Australian airline from competition.

Liberal MPs say the proposed \$10 billion takeover of 49 per cent of Qantas would be the perfect time to consider changes to aviation policy and allow rival companies such as Singapore Airlines access to the Pacific route.

A bid from Singapore Airlines to join the Pacific route, one of the world's most protected air routes, was rejected by the Government in February.

Singapore Airlines spokeswoman Kate Pratley said yesterday there was no justification in continually protecting Qantas from competition.

"To suggest that the Australian Government should continue to provide this unnecessary protection to a company that may soon be owned and controlled by a multi-billion-dollar international consortium is beyond reason," she said.

If the proposed takeover of Qantas from Macquarie Bank and US equity firm Texas Pacific Group succeeds, the Liberal members will use the purchase to push for changes to existing laws.

WA Senator Alan Eggleston said the Government was protecting Qantas at the expense of Australian consumers. "This is hurting the Australian tourism industry because potential tourists from North America are not coming because of the high cost," he said.

WA Liberal MP Michael Keenan said WA was particularly disadvantaged by the lack of competition.

"I think what Qantas needs is a good dose of competition," he said. "I think we should treat Qantas like all other Australian companies and drop this idea that it's somehow a protected species."

A spokeswoman for Transport Minister Mark Vaile said nothing had changed since the Singapore Airlines bid was rejected to warrant changing the system.