

REMOTENESS AND AIR TRAVEL: AUSTRALIAN ACADEMICS EXPERIENCE OF FLYING FOR WORK

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CONTEXT



Have tenured academic position, will travel (frequently)

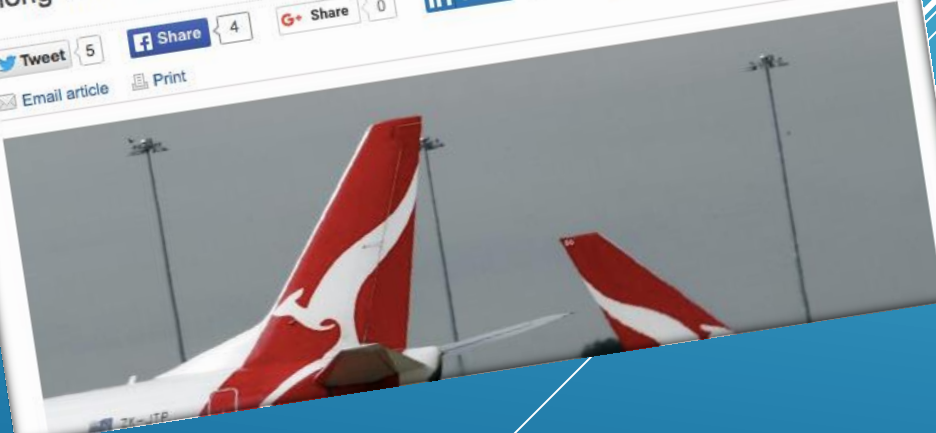
August 9, 2015
Erica Cervini

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Academics' travel to overseas conferences is expensive and environmentally damaging but many see it as a perk of their job, along with the Frequent Flyer points that come with the jaunt.

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The image shows a close-up of a red and white airplane tail fin, likely from a Scandinavian carrier, against a grey sky. The tail fin is the central focus of the photograph.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

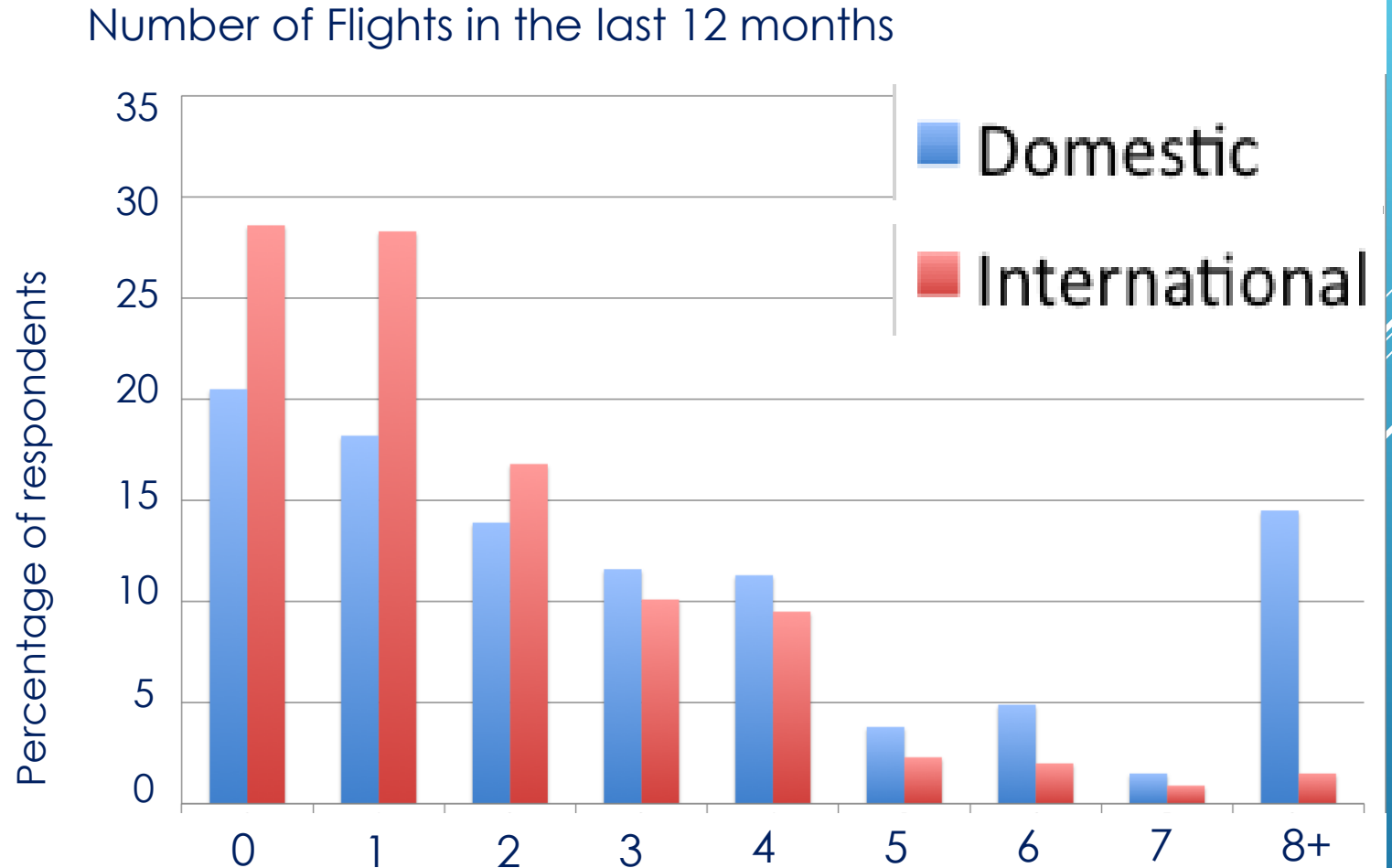
- ▶ What role does air travel play in academic life?
- ▶ What are Australian universities doing about the environmental impact of academic air travel?
- ▶ What alternative forms of academic practice might allow us to fly less?



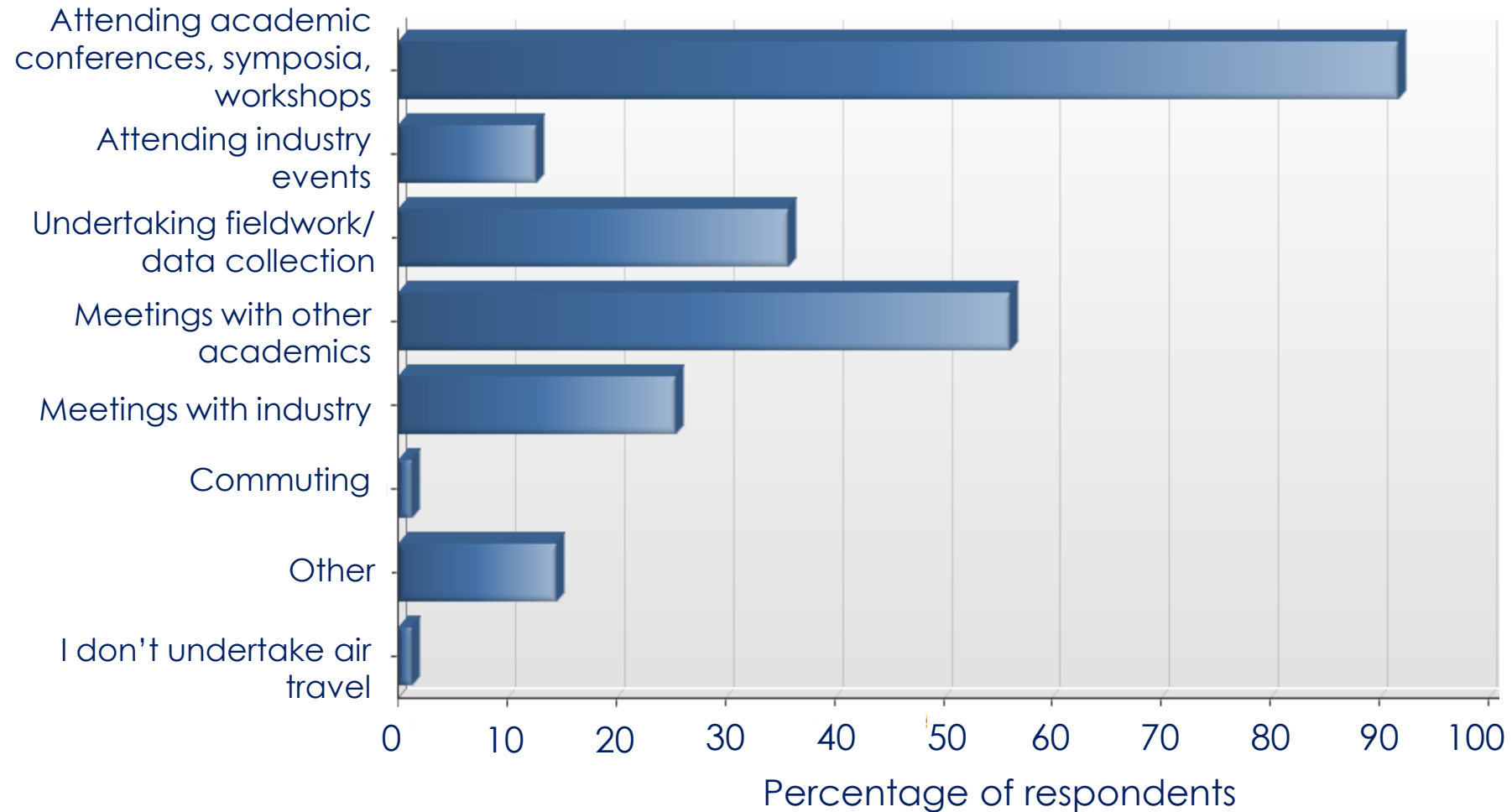
HOW MUCH DO ACADEMICS FLY?

- ▶ In the past year, Australian academics took, on average:
 - ▶ 3 domestic return flights, AND
 - ▶ 1.7 international return flights

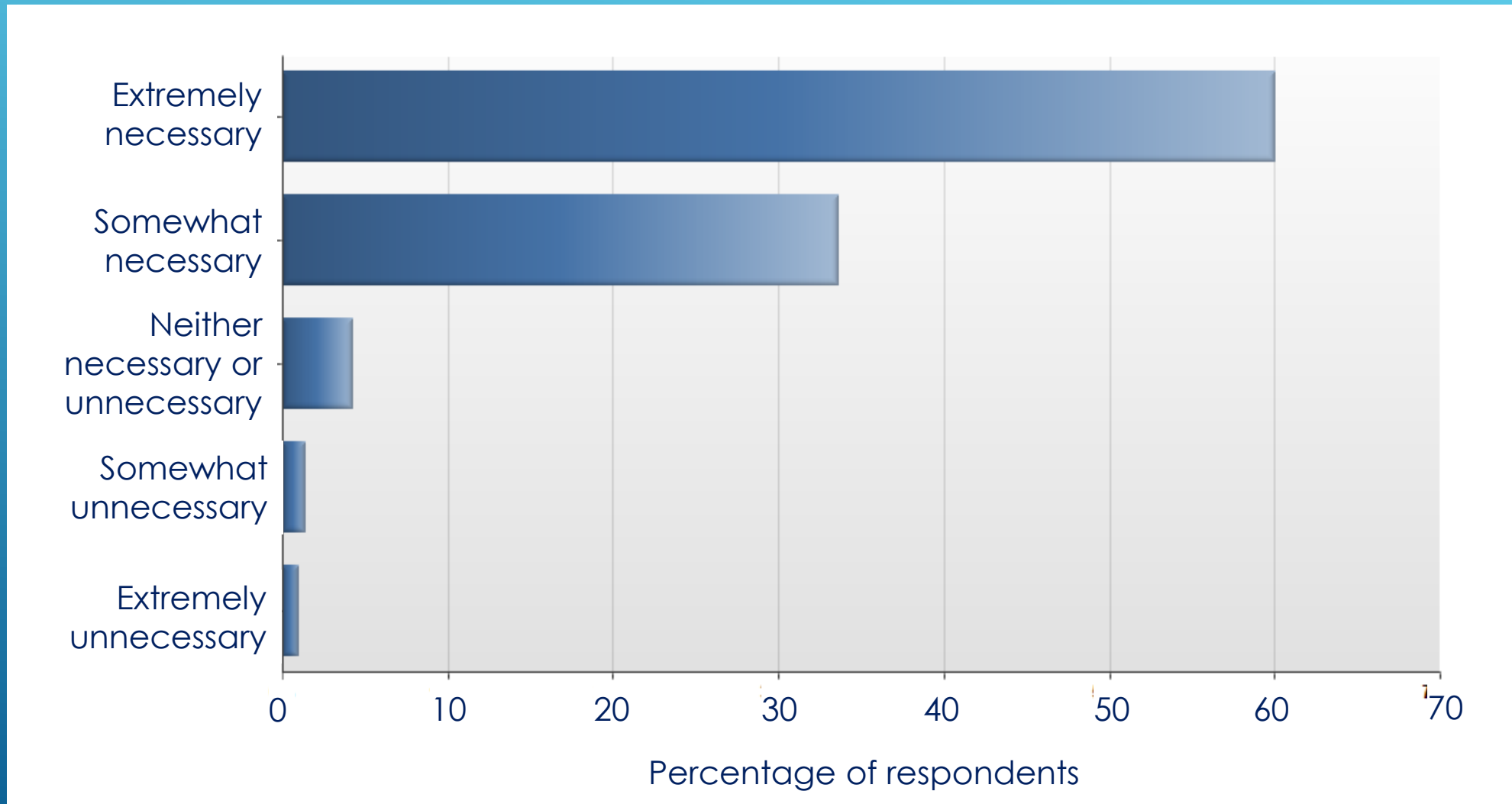
Does not include non-work related flights



Q: What are your primary reasons for undertaking work-related air travel?



Q: How necessary is work-related air travel to your ongoing academic career?



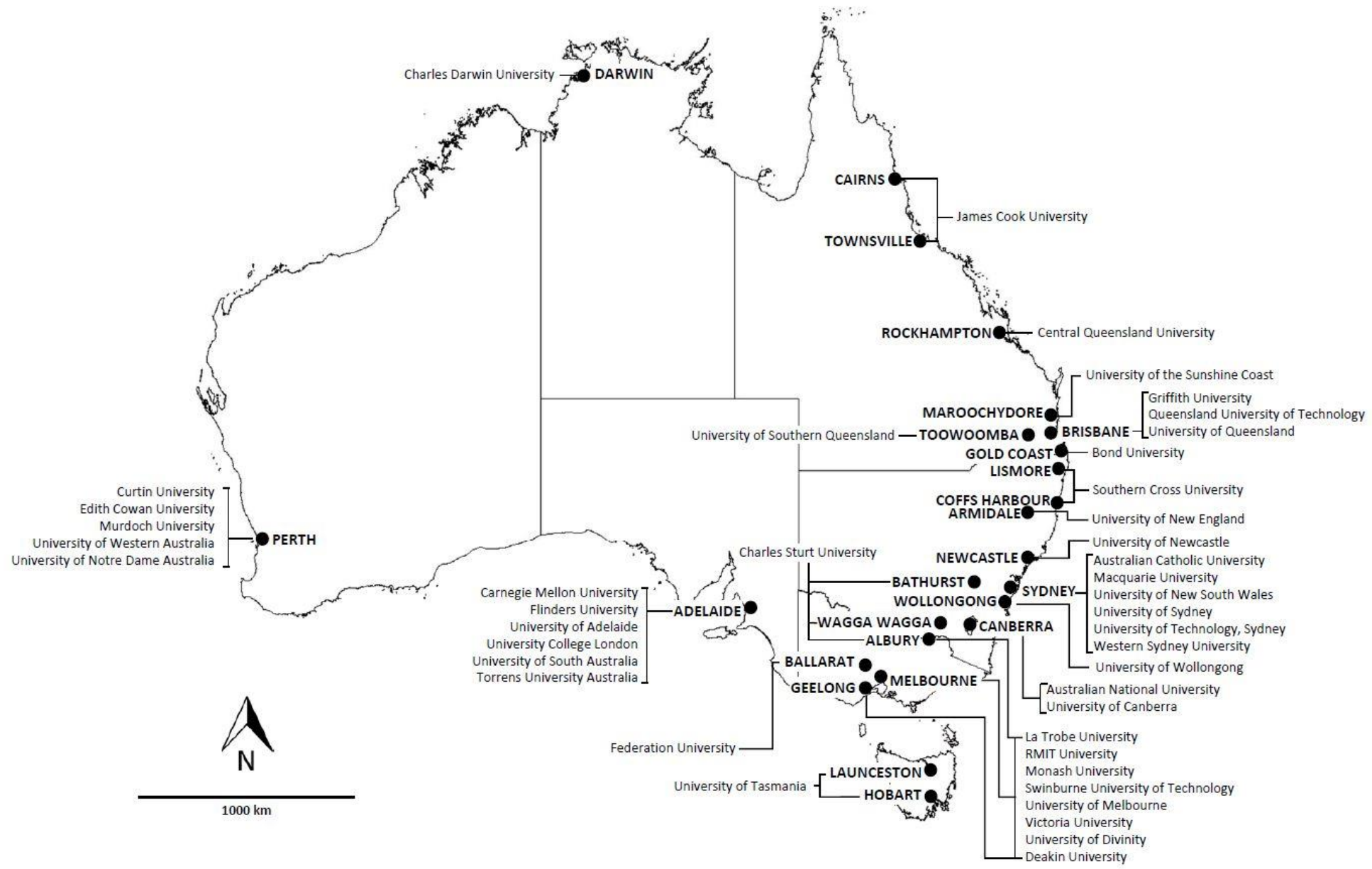
PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF AIR TRAVEL

- ▶ “Without it, **your research will be ignored**. You need to show your work at major conferences, and **build collaborative networks**.”
 - ▶ “Need to meet and **network** with international colleagues and **be seen** in order to get invited to co-write papers, be part of symposia, co-submit grants... All this is necessary to **build international collaborations**.”
 - ▶ “Without **ongoing active collaboration**, without **exposure**, and without quality communication, **my academic career would collapse**.”
- 

WHY DO THESE INTERACTIONS NEED TO BE FACE-TO-FACE?

- ▶ “Face to face engagement with colleagues is very important for **academics in regional Australia** to reduce their **feelings of isolation** and to promote productive research publication output. I do attend Skype and GOTO meetings online but one does not get the same level of **engagement** as one does face to face.”
- ▶ “**Nothing is as good** as for building international links and research networks as face-to-face meeting”
- ▶ “**Personal contact cannot be substituted** with emails.”





DOMESTIC REMOTENESS

- ▶ “Most of the peers in my field are located in, or in close proximity to metropolitan centers. Being in a regional center means **flying to Sydney as a first step** and if the location of the event is in a place other than Sydney, then one has to take at least one additional flight.”

 - ▶ “Townsville is near NOTHING. The vast majority of academics are in Victoria / NSW **and I usually need two flights** to visit for conferences and meetings.”
- 
- A series of three parallel white diagonal lines in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

DOMESTIC REMOTENESS

- ▶ “Melbourne is a **major Australian city** that is well connected and is also a destination that many national and international colleagues are drawn to, sometimes **negating the need for me to travel.**” *[Melbourne based Senior Research Fellow, Research Only, Female, Studies in Human Society]*
- ▶ “We are a **research ‘hotspot’** in my field – so many of our domestic colleagues **come to us!** I think we do less domestic travel than similar academics because of this.” *[Brisbane, Male, Full-Time, Research Fellow, Physical Sciences]*
- ▶ “Being in Sydney, most of my direct collaborators are **within driving distance.**” *[Sydney, Female, Full Time, Lecturer, Research and Teaching, Physical Sciences]*



INTERNATIONAL REMOTENESS

- ▶ “I live in the most isolated city in the world with **few opportunities for collaboration and engagement** with colleagues in my or related discipline. I’m very envious of colleagues in Europe where there are a large number of affordable and scholarly activities available that are only a short drive/train/plane ride away”
- ▶ “My research is primarily carried out internationally (Europe/US/Asia), hence scientific meetings are usually located internationally... The research in my domain requires a substantial level of currency and international coordination, therefore **conferences and meetings are the most suitable form of dissemination and cross-fertilization.**”



WHAT IS DRIVING THE NEED FOR AIR TRAVEL?

- ▶ Other policies undermine air travel reduction, e.g.
 - ▶ Internationalization strategies → targeting lucrative international student markets
 - ▶ Research academics → international research collaborations & publications
 - ▶ “RMIT – Global, Urban, Connected”; “Deakin: Worldly”
 - ▶ Institutional orientations = strong implicit requirement for air travel

NEW FORMS OF CONFERENCING

- ▶ 'No Fly', 'Low Carbon', 'Virtual' Conferences increasingly common
- ▶ Evolving formats from traditional conferences



Airliner Carbon Trail

CLIMATE CHANGE: VIEWS FROM THE HUMANITIES

A NEARLY CARBON-NEUTRAL CONFERENCE

TELEPRESENCE ROBOTS

Wheel based devices with electric motor

Remotely controlled over wifi

Camera, microphone, speaker, screen

Operated via app or browser window

Controlled with smartphone or keyboard





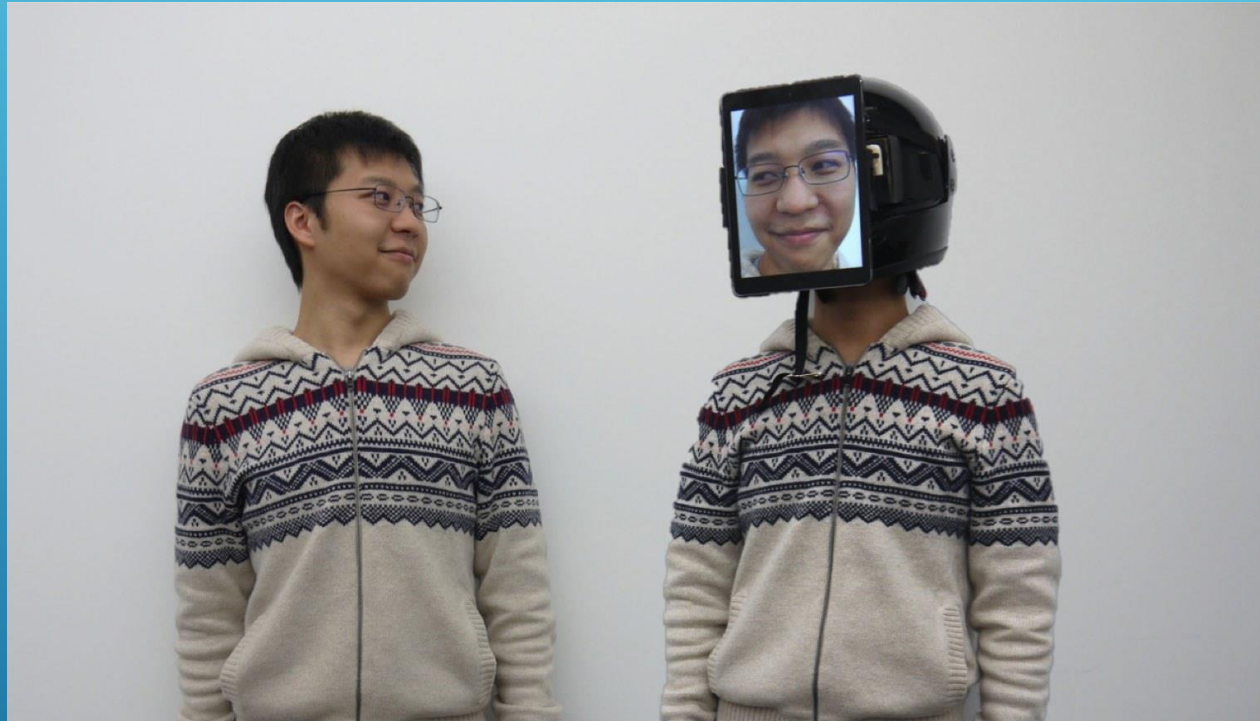


DIGITIZATION OF 'ANALOGUE' CONFERENCES

- Telepresence Robots (CHI 2017)



FUTURE CONFERENCING



'Chameleon Mask'



THANKS FOR LISTENING

<https://worklifeecologies.org/>

