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Rex returns....Flights up, up, away

By Matt Nicholls

CHEAP airfares have returned to Armidale following Rex Airline's much-hyped return on Friday.

Representatives from the Armidale Dumaresq Council, University of New England, business sector and schools were at the airport to welcome Rex back to the city.

Rex's deputy chairman John Sharp was on board the first flight which landed in Armidale slightly after its 2pm schedule as rain poured from the sky.

However, the sun emerged as Mr Sharp and the other passengers disembarked from the 34-seat Saab 340 aircraft to make their way into the terminal.

"As Australia's most on-time regional airline we are delighted to be bringing to Armidale a reliable and competitive air service that the entire New England region can count on," Mr Sharp said.

"Rex looks forward to building a strong partnership with the Armidale community to ensure we can continue to provide a sustainable air service for the long-term benefit of the Armidale region."

Rex's commencement of services between Armidale and Sydney has been well-received by the all three levels of government.

Member for Northern Tablelands Adam Marshall paid tribute to the Armidale Dumaresq Council, saying it was a "feather in its cap" for convincing Rex to return.

"We welcome Rex to Armidale and look forward to working together to deliver passenger growth and make the airport more sustainable," the MP said.

"The council should be proud that it beat several others to get the Rex contract."

However, Mr Marshall warned that Rex would not survive without the support of all sections of the community.

"Rex's re-entrance to the region is made in a climate where regional air services are under immense pressure – the recent collapse of Brindabella Airlines is evidence of this," he said.

"We must remember that larger regional centres such as Tamworth, still have just the one airline, so it's important that we don't take this situation for granted."

UNE's acting vice-chancellor Annabelle Duncan spoke in support of Rex's return, while the airline gave model planes to Mr Marshall and Armidale Dumaresq councillor Andrew Murat at the end of the official proceedings.

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