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Senator makes a stand on CASA

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BY SALLY CRIPPS

QUEENSLAND Nationals Senator Susan McDonald has backed her conviction that new Civil Aviation Safety Authority regulations will do nothing to improve safety standards for Angel Flight users, going against the government line in the process.

On Thursday she crossed the Senate floor to support a disallowance motion moved by Centre Alliance's Rex Patrick that would have scrapped onerous new regulations for non-emergency medical flights, Angel Flight in particular.

In doing so, she said that when CASA wasn't able to demonstrate a basis for increased regulation and costs through greater maintenance, it was necessary for her to not support additional aviation regulation that did not lead to greater safety, just higher costs.

The motion was lost 12-29 after the government and opposition voted against

it. Three of Ms McDonald's Nationals Senate colleagues, Bridget McKenzie, Matt Canavan and Perin Davey weren't present at the vote.

She said that as the chairwoman of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport committee, which recently inquired into the Australian Transport Safety Bureau's report on the June 2017 crash of a flight conducted on be-

half of Angel Flight Australia, she probably had the best understanding of what the regulations would mean to rural people.

The committee made two recommendations, to remove the provision for additional aeroplane maintenance requirements, which are beyond those required in the general aviation sector; and clarification around what constitutes the 'operating crew' for a community service flight, particularly as this relates to additional pilots and mentoring arrangements.

CASA, an independent

statutory authority, only adopted the second recommendation.

Angel Flight CEO Marjorie Pagani said she was extremely surprised not to have greater Nationals support on the issue, which she described as a win for the ego of CASA bureaucrats.

"Susan is right - how can you support a safety regulation with no benefit," she said. "She has shown the intestinal fortitude to do what's right rather than follow a party line."

The change means that maintenance costs for Angel Flight pilots could treble. For a single engine plane these currently average \$6000, and for twin engines it's \$12,000.

Ms Pagani described CASA's position as sheer bloody-mindedness.