Central Australian residents and the local tourism industry received some mixed news today with the announcement by Virgin Blue that they will commence a new Adelaide to Alice Springs service at the end of October but will cut their Sydney to Alice route.

Minister for Tourism, Clare Martin said the new Adelaide service will commence with four return flights a week, which is likely to increase to daily during peak travel times.

“This new route is very welcome news and recognition of the opportunities it presents and the - the introductory offer should see strong interest in this new service,” she said.

“However, Virgin Blue’s announcement that they will cut the direct Sydney to Alice Springs service from November is disappointing for the Central Australian tourism industry.

“While I am very disappointed at this decision to cut flights, passengers will still be able to access convenient interstate and overseas connections to and from Alice Springs via Adelaide .

“The change to Alice Springs services has clearly been made on commercial grounds and I understand that Virgin Blue will also be rationalising some other services in Australia as part of a general review of all their airline routes.

“Government will continue to work with Virgin Blue to increase services to the NT and emphasise that success in the Territory aviation market is closely tied in providing a network link between Alice Springs and Darwin , not just making each a final destination.”

Ms Martin said that while figures show there will be no overall net loss of seat capacity into Alice Springs with the introduction of the new Adelaide service, she is concerned at the loss of Sydney as a direct departure point as it is a major gateway for international visitors and for NSW in the domestic market.

“Virgin Blue has assured Government that their travellers will still consider flying to Alice Springs via Adelaide because of the good connections from Sydney and Melbourne,” Ms Martin said.