

## Air NZ sticks to plan for ice flight

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By [Jarrod Booker](#)

Air New Zealand has confirmed there will be room for only five relatives of victims of the Erebus air disaster to travel to Antarctica for the 30th anniversary, upsetting some who lost loved ones.

The airline was criticised for its proposal to take only five family members when it first announced plans to commemorate New Zealand's worst air disaster. All 257 people on board Air NZ flight TE901 were killed when it slammed into Mt Erebus on November 28, 1979.

The airline said yesterday that after consultation, it had strong support for the small number of family representatives to fill the limited slots available on a United States Air Force C-17 cargo plane, and attend services at Mt Erebus and Scott Base.

The five family representatives will be picked from a ballot, with three representing the families of passengers, and one each representing the cabin crew and flight crew.

Other spots will be taken by the Very Rev Peter Beck, from Christchurch Cathedral, to officiate at the services, a representative of the Government, Air New Zealand chief pilot Captain David Morgan and two representatives of TVNZ to broadcast and document the ceremonies.

Other family members of victims will attend memorial services held in Auckland and Christchurch, and messages will be left in a capsule next to the memorial cross at Mt Erebus.

The first anniversary of the Airbus crash off France will also be acknowledged on the same day.

Alister Preston, who lost his 19-year-old son Robert in the Erebus disaster, said he had heard nothing from Air New Zealand in 30 years, except for an offer to refund the cost of his son's ticket.

"I've got a suspicion, in a cynical way, that Air NZ is trying to gain as much publicity as they can.

"But at the time [of the disaster], they were so quick ducking for cover that you couldn't even see which way they went."

While he did not want to go to the ice at his age, Mr Preston said Air NZ "could have done far more if they had been really sincere about it".

"They could have taken a plane-load. I think it's an insult to put people into a ballot for five seats."

Andrew Bond lost his parents in the disaster and would dearly love to travel to the site where they died. He was disappointed there was room for only five family members, but said he could understand it was expensive and "a bloody hard place to get to".

"I think it will be quite a good emotional process for those who do end up going down."