

Erebus next of kin to go to Antarctica

By GREER McDONALD - The Dominion Post Last updated 05:00 13/10/2009

Air New Zealand will continue with plans to take five next-of-kin of those who died in the Erebus tragedy to Antarctica, despite objections from some family members.

A proposal to take the families involved in the Erebus tragedy to Antarctica for the 30th anniversary on November 28 this year was put up for consultation last month.

In a decision released publicly yesterday, Air New Zealand said it had been in touch with families who expressed interest and had begun the process of formally applying to the Government for access to the memorial cross at Mt Erebus.

Hawke's Bay mother-of-two Jackie Nankervis was 15 when she lost her father and uncle on flight TE901. The plane crashed on a one-day sightseeing flight to Antarctica on November 28, 1979, killing 257 people.

Her father, Ian O'Connor, 41, was on the DC10 aircraft to accompany his brother-in-law, Ronald Brehaut, 40, who was intellectually disabled and who had always wanted to make a big trip on an aircraft.

She said yesterday that she had mixed feelings about Air NZ's decision.

"I said of course I would apply, but it still doesn't sit well. If my brother or sister goes I'll be devastated, and if I go I'll feel guilty," the 45-year-old said.

"I want to get down there. I know it's not practical to get down there but I know it's not impossible."

Ms Nankervis was critical of two of the seats on the plane being taken up by an Air NZ staff member and a government representative.

"Is it really more important that they take those two seats? I've been waiting 30 years. We don't need them down there, they can go to the memorial service like I've had to."

She said her mother was devastated that she would not be able to be considered for the trip due to health issues.

"It would have been her golden wedding anniversary on the day."

Air New Zealand will also hold services in Auckland and Christchurch to mark both the 30th anniversary of Erebus and the first anniversary of the A320 accident in Perpignan off the coast of France on November 28.

An Erebus anniversary service also will be held at the memorial garden at Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland.

Air NZ declined to comment on how many next of kin had registered their interest in taking a seat on the flight, stating it would be "inappropriate" to comment on a "private matter between the families and Air New Zealand".