

Impractical to take more to Erebus, says Air NZ

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Air New Zealand is defending its decision to send only five representatives of victims of the Erebus crash to Antarctica to commemorate the 30th anniversary of New Zealand's worst air disaster.

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Families of the 257 people killed in the November 28, 1979, crash have questioned why so few of them are being offered seats to Antarctica to mark the anniversary.

Air New Zealand said after discussing the logistics of the trip with Antarctica New Zealand, taking everyone was not practically or logistically possible.

Antarctica NZ communications manager Matt Vance said it could only make 10 or 11 seats available on the United States Air Force C-17 cargo plane going to the ice. How Air New Zealand allocated the seats was its concern.

"We're in the business of running a scientific and environmental programme. This is their story."

Mr Vance said Antarctica NZ made three flights to the southernmost continent each year, and the risk and cost of taking anyone, let alone a plane-load of civilians, to the dangerous, remote part of the inhospitable continent was extremely high.

Jackie Nankervis, whose father, Ian O'Connor, and uncle Ronald Brehaut died in the crash, said her "heart sank" when she heard about the commemoration arrangements, wondering why the airline hadn't put on a flight so more could have gone.

– NZPA