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Budget airlines slammed over 'pilot poaching'

Regional airline Rex says budget airlines should be doing more to train pilots.

Rex says a national pilot shortage has affected its ability to guarantee services on a number of its routes.

In recent months it has reduced its service to Wagga Wagga by a third and has temporarily suspended its service to Cooma in the New South Wales Snowy Mountains.

Rex deputy chairman John Sharp says the airline has been losing increasing numbers of pilots to low-cost operators Jetstar and Virgin Blue.

He says Rex has decided to set up a pilot training program but is disappointed that the other airlines have not done the same, instead poaching pilots from Rex.

"We would like to think that both Virgin Blue and Jetstar could indeed do a whole lot more to solve their pilot shortage problems than just coming and raiding a regional airline operators such as Rex," he said.

He says he does not expect any more schedule changes because of the pilot shortage.

A spokeswoman for Virgin Blue says the company is not targeting Rex for recruitment and that it is a natural career path for pilots to move on from regional airlines.