

Ansett chief \$3.5m payout

Darren Goodsir

With thousands of displaced Ansett workers awaiting entitlements, it emerged yesterday that their former boss, Gary Toomey, received \$NZ4.2 million (\$A3.59 million) in a departure clause agreed to by Air New Zealand in the weeks after the airline's collapse.

The news, in the airline's annual report, came as speculation continued over whether Singapore Airlines would enter the domestic market.

Mr Toomey, the face of the ill-fated "Absolutely" celebrity advertising campaign, won a performance bonus along with fellow Air NZ directors just before Ansett lurched into

administration. His final payout figure had not previously been disclosed. Although he is not named in the report, Mr Toomey is likely to be the biggest recipient of a total \$NZ28.8 million in payments issued to 60 senior staff who lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, Singapore Airlines distanced itself from reports that it was about to decide whether to start a new domestic airline. A spokesman said the airline "was keeping its options open" in terms of its possible start-up in Australia.

Sydney Airport, which is pinning its hopes of filling the largely vacant former Ansett terminal on a third start-up, said talks were going positively.

Virgin Blue's head of commercial, David Huttner, said it was time Singapore Airlines disclosed its true intentions.

"It's about time Singapore did their business or got off the pot because all that is happening is that former Ansett staff are being given false hope," he said.

Qantas' share price dived on Tuesday amid reports that Singapore's entry was imminent and market rumours that Ansett's air operator's certificate had been acquired.

However, a spokesman for the Civil Aviation Safety Authority said Ansett's certificate no longer technically existed.

No decision on a start-up is expected until later in the year.