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Media release

## **CHRISTMAS CATASTROPHE AS FLIGHTS GROUNDED**

HUNDREDS of airline flights this summer are likely to be cancelled because one third of Australia's 16,000 aviation ground operations have been stranded with zero income for six months and have now left the workforce in desperate search for paid work.

And the situation is about to worsen with the remaining 9,000 workers forced to wait up to another three months before their incomes return to normal, creating fears that thousands more workers may quit in coming weeks in search of immediate paid work.

The end of JobKeeper in March this year has left most of these workers with no income since March this year.

That means hundreds of interstate and international flights could be grounded in the leadup to Christmas because of a shortage of professionally trained ground staff to service them.

The same phenomenon has hit the United States and Europe in recent months as aviation ground handling workforce shortages have grounded hundreds of flights<sup>1</sup>.

In Germany up to one third of flights have had to be cancelled because of a shortage of aviation ground handling staff<sup>2</sup>, who were previously stood down for extended periods with no pay.

Aviation ground operations staff perform 15 key functions including managing all aircraft movement on the ground, communicating with aircraft control towers, aircraft cleaning, security assessment of passengers at checkin, driving passenger buses across tarmacs, inflight catering and baggage and cargo handling.

Without them planes cannot fly.

However, an estimated 96 per cent of the Australian Government's \$5 billion aviation support package has been provided to airlines and airports, with only four per cent left for the 'vital third leg' of aviation, leaving the industry in an unbalanced and perilous state.

Included in this package has been an Aviation JobKeeper payment of \$750 per week that has been paid to all airline staff, but has been denied to outsourced specialist aviation ground operations workers.

As a result, the Australian Aviation Ground Handlers Alliance (AAGHIA) warned today that up to half of its staff were set to leave the industry for good, setting in train a cascading effect across the economy.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2021/07/17/airlines-asked-explain-delays-labor-shortage-us-senator/8002263002/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://theloadstar.com/europes-airports-and-handlers-ditching-cargo-as-passenger-flights-resume/>



“We are likely to see many flights grounded in November, December, January and February owing to a nationwide shortage of professional aviation ground operations staff,” AAGHIA Chair Glenn Rutherford said today..

“It will take at least six months to recruit workers when borders reopen, train them up to government standards and have them accredited by the government.

“The inescapable fact is that as borders reopen, and flights are rescheduled, many will be unable to occur due to a chronic shortage of vital aviation workers on the ground.

“What will be left is an industry of rookies, with many experienced and skilled staff having left the industry for good.”

Aviation consists of three parts: airlines, airports, and ground staff. Planes cannot fly without all three.

Eighty per cent of all aviation ground operations are performed by specialist outsourced providers, while only 20 per cent are performed by airlines themselves. This is a worldwide trend that has grown over the last 20 years, as airlines concentrate on flying.

Mr Rutherford said that the AAGHIA had been talking to the Australian Government since April this year about the impending crisis with no resolution.

“We are hopeful Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport, Barnaby Joyce, will be able to provide emergency funding relief immediately to ensure half of the remaining workforce are not lost in coming weeks,” he said.

“What at stake is Australia’s economic recovery. Without that support there could be a catastrophic impact on the national economy at precisely the time it is trying to reopen.

“All we ask is for our 9,000 specialist ground handlers to receive the same treatment as the rest of the aviation industry. Our workers are being denied the same financial support from the government for doing the same work, at the same airport for the same airline as inhouse employees.

“Shortages of critical aviation ground handling professionals are likely to affect rural and regional airports the hardest, owing to the greater reliance on outsourced specialist operations staff.

“Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania could be particularly badly hit, although every state will suffer.”

**Table 1:** The 15 aviation ground handling roles

Aircraft handling	Passenger handling
1. Aircraft safety inspections before takeoff	9. Operating passenger check-ins



2. Ensuring that baggage and cargo are weight-checked and distributed evenly, to confirm every aircraft is correctly balanced and safe to fly	10. Security assessment of passengers at check-in
3. Communicating with aircraft control towers	11. Identification of possible security, safety or terrorism threats by passengers
4. Managing all aircraft movement on the ground	12. Reconciliation of all passenger records with travellers on-board prior to takeoff – for safety and terrorism reasons
5. Towing aircraft across live runways	13. Inflight catering
6. Ground engineering	14. Operating airline passenger lounges
7. Aircraft cleaning	15. Driving passenger buses across tarmacs
8. All baggage and cargo handling	

Aviation ground staff shortages have become so severe in the United States that the US Transportation Security Administration is offering \$1,000 hiring bonuses as part of its push to add 6,000 screeners<sup>3</sup>.

Attached is a list of Australia’s 51 major airports and the proportion of ground operations functions performed by specialist outsourced companies.

**Table 2:** Australia’s top 51 airports and the proportion of flights serviced by outsourced providers

	LOCATION	PERCENTATION OF WORK CONDUCTED BY OUTSOURCED PROVIDERS	
		Checkin/ Customer service/ Above wing	Ramp/ Baggage/ Below wing
1	Adelaide	25%	75%
2	Albany	100%	100%
3	Albury	100%	100%
4	Armidale	100%	100%
5	Avalon	100%	100%
6	Ayers Rock	100%	100%
7	Ballina	100%	100%

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/28/airport-restaurants-tsa-offer-bonuses-amid-labor-shortage.html>



8	Bendigo	100%	100%
9	Brisbane	15%	75%
10	Broken Hill	100%	100%
11	Broome	100%	100%
12	Burnie	100%	100%
13	Cairns	70%	95%
14	Canberra	35%	100%
15	Carnavon	100%	100%
16	Coffs Harbour	100%	100%
17	Cooma	100%	100%
18	Darwin	60%	100%
19	Devonport	100%	100%
20	Dubbo	100%	100%
21	Emerald	100%	100%
22	Esperence	100%	100%
23	Gold Coast	80%	100%
24	Griffith	100%	100%
25	Hamilton Island	100%	100%
26	Hobart	100%	100%
27	Horn Island	100%	100%
28	Kalgoolie	100%	100%
29	Kangaroo Is	100%	100%
30	Karratha	100%	100%
31	Launceston	100%	100%
32	Mackay	100%	100%
33	Maroochydore	100%	100%
34	Melbourne	10%	70%
35	Mildura	100%	100%
36	Monkey Mia	100%	100%
37	Mt Isa	100%	100%
38	Mudgee	100%	100%
39	Newcastle	100%	100%
40	Orange	100%	100%
41	Perth	65%	100%
42	Port Macquarie	100%	100%
43	Proserpine	100%	100%
44	Rockhampton	100%	100%



45	Sydney	0%	80%
46	Tamworth	100%	100%
47	Taree	100%	100%
48	Townsville	65%	100%
49	Wagga Wagga	100%	100%
50	Weipa	100%	100%
51	Wyalla	100%	100%

#### About the Australian Aviation Grand Handlers Industry Alliance (AAGHIA)

The AAGHIA represents 80 per cent of all aviation ground handlers, or more than 9,800 workers across 51 Australian capital city and regional airports. Its members include Swissport, dnata, Menzies Aviation, Oceania Aviation, NTL Aviation Services, Precision Aviation Services, Aus Flight Handling and Star Aviation.