



## **Australian Federation of Air Pilots**

**Submission to the Senate Education and Employment  
References Committee Inquiry into:**

**The impact of Australia's temporary work  
visa programs on the Australian labour  
market and on the temporary work visa  
holders**

**1 May 2015**

## **The Australian Federation of Air Pilots**

Formed in 1938, the Australian Federation of Air Pilots ("the Federation") is the industrial and professional association for commercial air pilots in Australia. The Federation is the largest pilot association in Australia with over 4000 pilot members. The Federation is also a foundation member of the International Federation of Airline Pilots Association (IFALPA), the global body representing commercial pilots worldwide.

The Federation's membership coverage includes Virgin Australia pilots, Qantas owned subsidiary airline pilots (such as QantasLink and Jetstar), regional airline pilots, Australian pilots flying for overseas operators, general aviation pilots, flight instruction pilots, aero-medical pilots, corporate jet pilots, helicopter pilots and aerial agricultural pilots.

As a professional association, the members and staff of the Federation are active in promoting flight safety and improving Australian and global aviation standards.

Our diverse pilot membership base therefore places us in a strong position to comment on the impact of Australia's temporary work visa programs on the Australian labour market as it relates to professional pilots.

## **Background and Overview**

The Federation has previously written to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship expressing its concerns over how certain operators have employed pilots under the Temporary Work (Skilled) (Subclass 457) visa program when suitably qualified Australian pilots are available to take up these positions.

Previous correspondence on this matter includes:

1. Our letter of 3 February 2012 to the Minister raising concerns over the international advertising of s457 positions for the Skywest ATR operation; and
2. Our letter of 30 May 2013 to the Minister regarding the employment of s457 visa holders to take up flight instructor roles at Flight Training Adelaide.

We are also aware that Regional Express has employed a number of s457 visa holders for its regional Saab 340 operation when numerous suitably qualified Australian pilots are available to take up these positions.

Overall, the Federation believes that there are sufficient suitably skilled Australian pilots to fill the current pilot positions within Australia.

We further submit that the use of s457 visa holders to fill pilot vacancies is undermining the normal and reasonable training obligations of aviation operators. This is contributing to a continued reduction in general aviation and domestic flight instruction activities.

In short, we have seen instances of where the s457 visa program has been abused by operators and its continued use is undermining flight training activities for aspiring Australian pilots.

The Federation does not have specific submissions regarding all ten terms of reference of the Inquiry. The Federation makes specific submissions concerning terms of reference, 1, 2 and 5 as per below.

## **1) The impact of Australia's temporary work visa programs on the Australian labour market and on the temporary work visa holders**

The Federation believes that there are sufficient suitably skilled Australian pilots to fill the current pilot positions within Australia. Australian pilots would welcome the opportunity to be employed by operators who have employed pilots under the s457 visa program, such as Skywest (Virgin Australia Regional Airlines), Flight Training Adelaide and Regional Express.

All major aviation operators in Australia, including the regional airlines cited above, have significant 'hold files' of qualified commercial pilots who wish to progress their careers with that operator.

The practical impact of pilots being employed under the s457 visa program on the Australian labour market is that Australian pilots remain unemployed or have their career progression delayed.

## **2) The impact of Australia's temporary work visa programs on training and skills development in Australia**

The Federation believes that in certain instances the s457 visa program has operated to reduce training and skills development of Australian commercial pilots.

For example, when Skywest introduced the ATR aircraft into its fleet around 2012, it advertised s457 eligible positions on the ATR on a global pilot recruitment website.

While there were numerous experienced and qualified pilots on similar turbo-prop aircraft within Australia, we can only assume that as a relatively new aircraft to Australia, Skywest was attempting to avoid the cost of providing ATR specific training to the Australian pilots (instead preferring pilots already qualified on the type). This approach had no regulatory basis and it operated to reduce skills development within Australia.

Similarly, by engaging a number of flight instructors under the s457 visa program, Flight Training Adelaide inhibited the ability of its junior and less specialised instructors from gaining higher level instructor ratings (or already qualified Australian pilots from obtaining such a position).

## **5) The adequacy of the monitoring and enforcement of the temporary work visa programs**

By virtue of the Ministerial replies to our correspondence regarding s457 visa program concerns we are aware of some changes to the program designed to ensure the intent of the program. These changes are welcome however we have not observed any tangible enforcement or change in behaviour.

The Federation believes that any employer who wishes to access the s457 program must clearly demonstrate they were first unable to find suitably skilled Australians. In the case of employers seeking to employ pilots under the Temporary Work (Skilled) (Subclass 457) visa program, **the Federation would be happy to assist the Department in determining whether employer claims of a suitable Australian candidate not being available are genuine.**

## Further information

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