

Opening Statement — Select committee into COVID-19

Linda White--ASU

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The ASU is the largest union in the aviation industry in Australia with members in Qantas, Virgin, Jetstar, Regional Express, QantasLink, and in all Overseas carriers with offices in Australia like Emirates, Singapore Airlines, Qatar, Malaysian, Thai Airways, Air New Zealand, Air Niugini and countless others as well as members in ground handlers like Menzies, Dnata, Swissport and Oceania. We are also the Travel industry union with members in Flight Centre, Helloworld and QBT among others.

The industry has been devastated by the government actions to close borders both internationally and domestically and our members have experienced a range of issues as detailed in our submission. Work has reduced to virtually nothing though domestic flying is recovering albeit slowly.

They have also experienced issues associated with the health response to COVID -19 as it relates to flying – for example in the early days our members at some airports watched as Border Force were in full hazmat gear meeting international aircraft and they were struggling to get masks, gloves and hand sanitizer working in the same areas, this was very disconcerting for those at the frontline.

Similarly the COVID -19 outbreak at Qantas at Adelaide airport in late March 2020 and the quarantining of first the below wing staff and then 2 weeks later the above wing staff was stressful for all concerned and we were left to wonder why all the staff were not quarantined initially – there seemed to be a failure in the analysis of contact or a failure to take a cautious approach.

The ASU is now dealing with significant proposals for redundancies at some carriers and we are engaged in ongoing consultations about stand downs and the sharing of the work that is available --- this will be ongoing and will take many months.

We are also working with the other unions in Virgin and with the administrators and the buyers to keep Virgin Flying and this too will take significant work, involve job losses and the sharing of limited work.

To coin a phrase – it is all happening and the issues that we are dealing with effect all employers in the industry all the time

AS our submission highlights the viability of the industry and economic survival of our members has been dependant on Jobkeeper being available to staff. The subsidies that the government has offered depends on flying and when there is no flying there are no subsidies.

On Jobkeeper – thousands in the industry miss out on these payments because of who their companies are owned by and also because their employer refuses to apply for Job keeper in the case of Thai Airways. The plight of Dnata workers has been highly publicised but there are many employees of international carriers in the same situation because of the ownership of their airline and today I have with me Maree Keygan who will briefly explain how the Australian employees of air nuigini are affected.