



15 February 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

**Re: Update to RRAT References Committee Inquiry into:
The future of Australia's aviation sector, in the context of COVID-19 and conditions post
pandemic**

The Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP), thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide an update to the inquiry. This letter is intended to provide additional information and positions to our previous two submission to this inquiry. Since we last contributed input, Australia's vaccination rates have increased and many government-initiated restrictions have eased, including most domestic and international border restrictions.

Similarly, Australia is beginning to understand what "living with COVID -19" means. In particular, there appears to be greater comprehension that vaccinations alone won't return us to pre-pandemic conditions. Furthermore, we have a better understanding of the impact that virus-variants can have on the health system, labour supply, the economy, and the ongoing need for targeted government involvement.

There are many challenges that the COVID -19 pandemic has placed on aviation globally. In our view, the pandemic continues to disproportionately burden the aviation sector, which warrants targeted government assistance. The AFAP would like to draw your attention to these two matters:

1. Changed circumstances support the need for a funded Job Ready Pilot (JRP) program.
2. Australia needs to act expeditiously to retain Australian pilots for Australian flying roles.

Living with COVID and the need for a JRP program

Our previous submissions have stated reasons for a funded JRP and those should be referred to for the main detail and justifications. Additionally, the AFAP believes it is important to point out that the virus is continuing to affect the supply of labour to businesses and the economy more generally. Pilots are needing to isolate or take sick leave due to infection or suspected infection. This is obviously having an effect on the overall available pool of pilots at a given time. We do not envisage any near-term change to this circumstance either.

The AFAP is not suggesting that a JRP program could fill sickness related vacancies overnight. We do however believe that Australia should be in a position to reflect that the virus will continue to have an effect and that "snap-back" economic expectations are an unrealistic hope for many sectors,

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including aviation. We believe that support for a broad individual pilot recurrency program, such as the JRP program proposal, is an affordable and targeted way to mitigate these ongoing risks and challenges.

For the foreseeable future, government considerations should include the lessons-learned re “living with COVID” and should include consideration for the ongoing economic pressures from labour supply, which are especially difficult to supplement for specialist and qualified roles such as that of air pilots.

USA based operators are targeting Australian pilots

The AFAP is aware of proactive recruitment activities by some USA based airlines, which is supported by their version of skilled migration visa program (“E3 Visas”).

We understand that the current combined quantity of Australian pilots sought by USA operators is in the vicinity of 1000. This is a relatively small quantity when compared to the number of professional pilots in the USA but is a high percentage of the total number of professional pilots in Australia.

If an Australian pilot were to take up such an opportunity, their licenses would require a conversion so as to be recognised in the USA aviation regulatory system. This takes some time and commitment but is not an insurmountable endeavour. Once this occurs though, we suggest that an Australian pilot qualified and employed to fly in a USA airline would remain lost to the Australian system for some time (likely years). Alternatively, a pilot who is funded to regain the use of their Australian license and flight crew qualifications will be less likely to want to repeat the process soon after to enter the USA aviation system.

Thus, we suggest that a proactive and funded recurrency of the cohort of Australian pilots not currently employed by an Australian operator will greatly help to ensure they return and remain as a ready employment resource in Australia, for the betterment of the Australian community and economy.

Yours sincerely,

Captain Louise Pole
President AFAP

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