

Firstly I will make this opening statement available to the Secretariat after these proceedings to assist with Hansard.

Today I will make two overall contributions to this Committee's important work. The first involves JobKeeper and the future of the scheme. The second involves the need for a national strategy when it comes to the aviation industry.

In relation to JobKeeper I'll begin by congratulating the Government for introducing the JobKeeper program in the first place and today announcing its extension, although the rationale as to cutting payment levels doesn't seem to stack up. While the overall design of the scheme is not perfect, I think it showed real political courage to introduce it and it has no doubt helped many Australians to keep their heads above water.

However, where this Government needs to be condemned in the strongest possible terms is the decision, made literally days before the original program was supposed to begin, to exclude a whole group of aviation workers. By introducing a regulation that companies ultimately owned by foreign sovereigns could not access JobKeeper, workers like Darlene Bailey and around 5,500 other aviation workers employed by dnata and Cabin Services Australia have now not received a cent since mid-March when they were stood down.

Let's remember the purpose of this scheme – to keep workers and their employers connected during the global pandemic. This is a payment that goes straight into the pockets of workers; the company is merely a conduit to distribute the money. There is no way that a sovereign Government can use Australian taxpayer dollars other than to distribute it to another Australian taxpayer.

Darlene and her fellow workers at dnata and Cabin Services Australia have paid Australian taxes all of their lives and many have never asked the Government for anything – the quiet Australians that our Prime Minister always speaks of. Yet in their hour of need their Government has abandoned them. And what makes matters worse is that only two years ago many of these workers – including Darlene - worked for the national carrier – Qantas Catering, in some cases for over 20 years, – until Qantas decided that they wanted to sell off their catering arm to a foreign Government and this Government approved the sale. In other words, an ownership change, which these workers didn't want, has resulted in them missing out on JobKeeper.

It's shameful, and gut wrenchingly for Darlene and her 5,500 colleagues it appears from today's announcement that this situation has not changed. I would urge the Government to instead adopt the principles of AviationKeeper – a payment that would apply to all aviation workers - in order to fulfil the original principle of JobKeeper and keep these dnata and Cavin Services Australia connected to their employer rather than being forced to join the unemployment queue. Australia will not be ready to fly again if these vital catering workers do not have jobs.

The second major failing that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought into the light of day is something that has existed for a long time in the aviation industry – Aviation Executives and Shareholders receiving all of the rewards and taking on none of the risks while the opposite is true for aviation workers.

Let's take a moment to think about it – up until recently, when Qantas was raking in record profits, the CEO became the highest paid in the country and highest paid aviation CEO in the world while shareholders enjoyed dividends and increased share prices. Then when things

took a turn the Government stepped in with taxpayer money to in theory help stabilise the industry but also stabilise the position of Executives and shareholders. It's pretty easy to take a pay cut for a few months when you made \$24 million the previous year.

As for workers, when times were good they were lucky if they received 3% wage rises, many could not get more than 20 hours guaranteed work each week and in some cases had to sleep in the baggage room during six hour unpaid breaks. Imagine being at the airport for 12 hours and being paid for half that time at Award wages. And this is when times were good. Now that times are bad, workers are stood down without receiving pay from their companies, many will lose their jobs and those lucky enough to cling on will no doubt be told they need to be restrained with no wage increases and less guaranteed hours and conditions.

As if all of this wasn't bad enough great, big, private monopolies in the form of airports sit on top of all of this, dictating their will whenever they please, whether it be through leasing costs for business, slots for airline companies or parking for passengers.

Put simply the current aviation model is irreparably broken, the power imbalances are too great and there needs to be fundamental change. Aviation is a public good which warrants strong Government regulation, oversight, planning, investment and equity. We urgently need two things; one, a body which can make enforceable orders to introduce appropriate standards, level the playing field to put a check on monopolistic tendencies, resolve industry disputes and make recommendations to Government.

And secondly aviation workers need the respect, dignity and fairness at work that has been lacking for so long. In the normal course of events if you looked out onto the tarmac at Sydney Airport you could see eight workers wearing eight different shirts all performing the same job, sometimes on the same aircraft and for the same clients receiving eight vastly different rates of pay and conditions. During the recent Jetstar dispute in one meal room of around 50 workers there were literally seven different categories of workers working for, or in conjunction with, the same company. How have we let this happen in 2020 Australia – a race to the bottom in standards for aviation workers while the highest paid CEO in the country looks on?