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Media release

HUNDREDS OF AIRLINES FLIGHTS COULD BE GROUNDED THIS SUMMER

HUNDREDS of airline flights could be grounded this summer because thousands of critical aviation ground operations workers are on the cusp of leaving the industry as they have been excluded from the Australian Government's support package for the rest of the sector.

The Australian Government announced a \$750 a week support package last week that is designed to protect local aviation jobs and ensure these skilled workers are available when normal flight schedules resume in coming months.

However, only airline staff are eligible, with specialist aviation ground operations staff employed by third party suppliers excluded.

Without aviation ground operations, planes cannot fly.

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

Aviation ground operations staff perform 15 key functions at airports including; conducting aircraft safety inspections before takeoff, taxiing aircraft onto runways, ensuring that baggage and cargo are safely balanced in aircraft holds, communicating with aircraft control towers, managing all aircraft movement on the ground, aircraft cleaning, security assessment of passengers at checkin, driving passenger buses across tarmacs, inflight catering and baggage and cargo handling.

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.

Australian Aviation Ground Handling Industry Alliance Chair Glenn Rutherford said today that Australia's economic recovery this summer could be threatened.

"Our 9,800 specialist ground handlers 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," he said.

"If that protection is not extended to all aviation ground operations personnel, it will inevitably mean a large proportion of our workforce will pursue other more financially secure work in the weeks ahead, after almost 18 months of diminished or no work.

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

"That means 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.



“This is precisely the time when the Australian economy is set to recover from COVID-induced lockdowns and when demand for flights is expected to strengthen.

“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.”

Mr Rutherford said Europe and North America were already suffering a similar aviation ground operations labour bottleneck, which is artificially capping the number of flights that can occur, despite strong demand from the flying public and regulatory approval to open up flight schedules again.

“Aviation is made up of airports, airlines and specialist aviation ground operations. Without all three, planes cannot fly,” he said.

“Excluding specialist aviation ground operations staff from the government packaged has not been explained and presumably is the unintended consequence of a worthy policy initiative.”

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	



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

	LOCATION	TOTAL FLIGHTS		FLIGHTS	PERCENTATION OF WORK CONDUCTED BY OUTSOURCED PROVIDERS	
		WEEKLY FLIGHTS			Checkin/ Customer service/ Above wing	Ramp/ Baggage/ Below wing
		MAY	AUG	% Variance		
1	Adelaide	585	255	(56)%	25%	75%
2	Albany	35	35	0 %	100%	100%
3	Albury	80	4	(95)%	100%	100%
4	Armidale	24	2	(92)%	100%	100%
5	Avalon	39	0	(100)%	100%	100%
6	Ayers Rock	20	3	(85)%	100%	100%
7	Ballina	104	19	(82)%	100%	100%
8	Bendigo	22	2	(91)%	100%	100%
9	Brisbane	1138	483	(58)%	15%	75%
10	Broken Hill	15	4	(73)%	100%	100%
11	Broome	43	43	0 %	100%	100%
12	Burnie	8	0	(100)%	100%	100%
13	Cairns	338	256	(24)%	70%	95%
14	Canberra	294	110	(63)%	35%	100%
15	Carnavon	12	12	0 %	100%	100%
16	Coffs Harbour	68	5	(93)%	100%	100%
17	Cooma	3	4	33 %	100%	100%
18	Darwin	198	142	(28)%	60%	100%
19	Devonport	35	7	(80)%	100%	100%
20	Dubbo	45	3	(93)%	100%	100%
21	Emerald	13	12	(8)%	100%	100%
22	Esperence	24	24	0 %	100%	100%
23	Gold Coast	378	150	(60)%	80%	100%
24	Griffith	63	9	(86)%	100%	100%
25	Hamilton Island	43	16	(63)%	100%	100%
26	Hobart	172	81	(53)%	100%	100%
27	Horn Island	10	10	0 %	100%	100%



28	Kalgoolie	38	24	(37)%	100%	100%
29	Kangaroo Is	27	3	(89)%	100%	100%
30	Karratha	47	40	(15)%	100%	100%
31	Launceston	91	28	(69)%	100%	100%
32	Mackay	81	65	(20)%	100%	100%
33	Maroochydore	104	22	(79)%	100%	100%
34	Melbourne	962	162	(83)%	10%	70%
35	Mildura	96	21	(78)%	100%	100%
36	Monkey Mia	6	6	0 %	100%	100%
37	Mt Isa	5	4	(20)%	100%	100%
38	Mudgee	0	0	0 %	100%	100%
39	Newcastle	109	17	(84)%	100%	100%
40	Orange	25	2	(92)%	100%	100%
41	Perth	880	638	(28)%	65%	100%
42	Port Macquarie	29	2	(93)%	100%	100%
43	Proserpine	25	22	(12)%	100%	100%
44	Rockhampton	75	65	(13)%	100%	100%
45	Sydney	779	96	(88)%	0%	80%
46	Tamworth	40	3	(93)%	100%	100%
47	Taree	0	0		100%	100%
48	Townsville	258	160	(38)%	65%	100%
49	Wagga Wagga	98	16	(84)%	100%	100%
50	Weipa	18	18	0 %	100%	100%
51	Wyalla	10	4	(60)%	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.