



FLIGHT ATTENDANTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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Ms Sharon Bird

Committee Chair

House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications

Suite R1, 121

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Bird

RE: Cabin Crew Ratio – Proposed Rule Change

We refer to the public hearings held 25 May and 1 June (where CASA was before the Committee). We would like to draw to the attention of the Committee the following:

- A spokesman for CASA referred to an email of support from the FAAA Regulatory Affairs officer but did not refer to the author by name.

The FAAA Domestic/Regional Division is not familiar with this email and would not ordinarily have sent such an email. We would like to point out it may have been from a representative of the International Division of the FAAA which did not enter a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry.

- In terms of CASA's consultation process, we would ask that the Committee members also be advised that the only contact regarding the exemptions came directly from the airlines when they sought to discuss with the Association the industrial consequences post the granting of the exemptions. CASA did not seek any consultation from the FAAA prior or during the granting of exemptions. The only consultation process that did occur was after the exemptions were granted and related to formulating the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM), the very rule change that we so veritably oppose.
- Overwing self-help exits are the sole responsibility of passengers. There is a perception by passengers that there would be a cabin crew member to guide them in the event of an evacuation.

- We further highlight to the Committee that CASA and the airlines are not only proposing one less safety and security trained cabin crew member be required on single aisle aircraft, but that a further reduction of a crew member should be permitted to occur due to 'operational circumstances'. If this is introduced, it will mean that the minimum crewing levels will be further reduced. The A321 aircraft could have 4 crew instead of the already reduced 5, resulting in another floor level exit without a trained crew member responsible for an evacuation through that door. A B737 would have 3 crew members instead of 4 meaning a floor level exit would not have a crew member responsible for that door. The list goes on with all the exemptions currently in place.
- Also of note is that, not content with the proposal being put forward for aircraft carrying up to 216 passengers, Qantas in its' submission, is already suggesting that the number of passengers should be 220. In all probability CASA could provide 'an exemption'. Where will this end? Next will be a proposal to change the rules for twin aisle aircraft, as these will be 'out of step' and not suit the airlines' commercial interests.
- The Association was asked to provide our views of the cost to a passenger if the Committee recommended and Parliament accepted the revocation of the exemptions. While we do not have access to airline figures, our calculations are as follows:

B737-800 with an average passenger load of 80%, the crew member would cost;

*Qantas	\$1.56 per passenger
Virgin	\$1.40 per passenger

A320

Tiger	\$1.00 per passenger
Jetstar	\$1.00 per passenger

A321

Jetstar	\$0.80 per passenger
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***For Qantas, there would be no extra cost because the crew complement has not been reduced at this stage. At the June 1 public hearing, CASA commented that the crew member has already been removed because of the exemption. This is in fact not the case for Qantas. With Qantas' fleet of B737-800, this would be a substantial percentage of Australian aircraft currently with exemptions.**

The Australian public has not asked that its safety and security be reduced, when flying on business or pleasure. The Australian Government has, so rightly, introduced tougher aviation laws just recently, stating:

"The safety of Australians is our highest priority. Threats against our aviation sector put lives at risk, cause distress to passengers and staff and create unnecessary costs for the industry."

"This is the latest step in our work to create safer skies for the travelling public and those who work in the aviation industry – in the air and on the ground,"

The Flight Attendants' Association urges the Government to maintain its firm stand, reject the proposal to change the Cabin Crew Ratio in Australia, maintain world's best practice and continue to create safer skies for the travelling public.

Also for the Committee's consideration, please find attached examples of cabin crew's personal experiences and concerns when operating with minimum crew ratios.

The FAAA has also been petitioning the general public regarding the proposed change. We would like to present the petition in person to you next Thursday, 16 June 2011.

Yours faithfully

Jo-Ann Davidson

Secretary

FAAA Domestic/Regional Division

Cabin Crew Response

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – CABIN CREW RATIO

The FAAA Domestic/Regional Division lists below Cabin Crew responses to the Association highlighting some of their experiences whilst operating under reduced cabin crew to passenger ratios, resulting from exemptions issued by CASA.

They are separated under the following headings and quoted from our members' reports. We can supply names and contacts if the Committee wishes. Only one cabin crew member asked for anonymity.

We have included one report in its entirety because the content paints such a clear and disturbing picture of cabin crew operating under a current CASA exemption.

Safety Related Duties Compromised:

...Operating on the B737-800 I experience the following on a regular basis -
Safety briefings cut short ...Pre-flight security checks not completed up to standard...Standard Operating Procedures on turn-around not fully adhered to

...I was cracking the door and completing the cabin condition log. A very unsafe position to be in, distracted by something I was unable to complete during the flight

... safety procedures were missed in order to (nearly) complete the service

...On all occasions crew were unable to perform the required pre flight safety checks within the time constraints. Pre flight safety briefs were rushed through. On an occasion boarding was attempted without pre flight safety checks taking place

... As a Cabin Manager on the A321 with reduced crew, I am required to sit at the front of the aircraft alone, which therefore means I am responsible for both the Left 1 and Right 1 doors. This means, I have to brief the able-bodied passengers in row 1 during the boarding process, and ask them if they are willing and able to assist in an emergency, and explain to them how to open the exit if I am incapacitated.

I believe this is too much responsibility to place in the hands of a passenger, responsibility that should be shared with the trained cabin crew on the aircraft, NOT the passengers who have never operated an exit.

...I have had some passengers scoff at the suggestion they have to help in an emergency when they have actually paid extra to sit up the front.

...Inability to complete inflight security checks every 20 minutes due to high workload

...the crew was under extreme pressure to rush through and possibly skip some pre flight duties in order to get the aircraft departed on time

...safety checks of equipment rushed due to time constraints

...Our pre flight Safety and security checks are at best cursory

...Increased pressure for on time departures where I had to report myself for missing a safety step prior to door closure

...I and most of my colleagues take our pre flight checks very seriously but often, I observe some colleagues who due to the time pressures we face along with fatigue, are less than diligent

...With one less person to achieve our tasks, we are often desperate to get into the aircraft and get it set up. This leads to the potential for errors and mistakes to be made. This is most definitely stressful for all concerned

...same amount of checks required to be done, in same amount of time, with one less crew member = rushing and not always being able to thoroughly check equipment

...During the pre-flight check phase, as a Cabin Manager it is my responsibility to check all the equipment at the forward of the aircraft including the toilets – a responsibility on the A320 that is usually shared between 2 crew members. I believe there is a safety issue here, as too many duties and checks are required to be done as result of Cabin Managers being up the front alone, and if there was another crew member, the checks and duties would be a lot more thorough and efficient.

Boarding & Passenger Suitability to Travel:

...the overwing exits (passengers) on 737 are not reading the safety card

...At times we detect a passenger is not suitable for travel after they have boarded the aircraft. This could be better if they were detected before they are allowed on the aircraft.

Crew unable to properly supervise passengers and emergency exits during boarding

...An intoxicated woman who was not picked up at screening at the boarding gate as we only had 1 flight attendant to board, monitor baggage, sign for unaccompanied minors and assess passengers.

...Boardings are pretty well always mad / crazy. Include the need to brief parents with infants, passengers with disabilities, passengers with medical clearances, and over-wing safety briefings, (+ liaising with catering personnel), well then just trying to organise excess hand baggage for passengers is very challenging and consequently, stressful. This is an aspect of our job we as crew believe is genuinely compromised by the loss of the 5th crew member.

....168 passengers to board by themselves including pax with disability, um's (Unaccompanied minors) and making sure pax was compliant

....increased pressure during boarding to achieve on time and compliant departure.

....My experience when operating with 3 crew on B717. Boarding gate – 1 cc boarding trying to watch for all issues with passengers, some things slip through such as oversized baggage, hot drinks, no shoes being worn.

....If a 5th crew member was assigned (A320) that would alleviate the problem and both ensure correct boarding procedures were observed

.... I have experienced an injury to flight attendant due to excessive luggage lifting as she was the only FA in that area during boarding.

....now done by only one cabin crew member = double the length of time to board pax = late departures

....Not picking up on unsuitable passengers during boarding - those incorrectly seated in the over wing and intoxicated pax. A guest was noted after take off to be seated in the over wing with a broken foot in a walk on cast

Work Load and Fatigue:

....Fatigue is rife and you are made to feel inadequate if you are tired or go fatigued during a multi day trip.

....on the 717, the workload really has increased, we are fatigued because although one crew member has been taken off each flight, which means increased reserve coverage, Cobham has increased the amount of double shifts (around 10 hours) to maximise crew hours, and you really notice the additional workload on double shifts with one less crew member.

....Back pain constantly with trying to move double trolleys on own.

....Crew dealing with fatigue/sickness on days off to keep work records clean.

....Inability to achieve adequate sustenance and hydration during certain pairings.

....During flight the crew was extremely rushed, unable to properly hydrate, in some cases the crew could not eat, drink or use the bathroom. Crew finished the shift exhausted, hungry and thirsty.

I have started my next shift after a reduced crew feeling very fatigued and not properly hydrated.

....Job satisfaction is at an all time low

...The whole exercise is exhausting on a daily basis...
...Inability to achieve work/lifestyle balance due to higher workloads.

...A constant risk of falling asleep whilst driving home. I have experienced it and so have many of my colleagues.

...It's almost impossible on the shorter sectors and indeed on the longer very busy flights to get any kind of meal break. Between the inflight service, garbage collection, toilet checks etc. and galley close-out procedures.

...Rest breaks are not possible on flights with reduced crew causing crew to go for long periods without rest and toilet breaks.

...more work, less crew and consequently greater fatigue levels, lead to the potential for injuries

...Having one less crew member means we need to rush to get the carts out in order to get the service completed on time

...We have to complete the exact same service, in the same amount of time with one less cabin crew member

...With early starts, long days and busy sectors a lot of days go by in a blur where you are tired and running on auto pilot - sometimes it's difficult to get PA's out correctly and think about what you're doing

...Crew are already running on empty with longer days, compromised sleep

...with the onset of losing the 5th crew member, I have genuinely felt my fatigue levels increase to the point that I am often so tired that my judgement / Situational awareness is seriously compromised.

Medical Situations:

...I operated the B737-800 with 4 f/a's...f/a were rushed to a point that they were unable to provide the care required to an elderly pax who required a wheelchair.

...I have on several occasions had several medical emergencies occurring at once. One less crew member makes this situation very difficult. We deal with what we have to as best we can but under these circumstances the trauma that one feels post the event is indeed great.

...this would not have been possible with 4 crew. (B737-800)

In-flight Incidents:

....I had a specific situation on the Dash 8 300 that if the additional crew member had not been present there would have been a very different outcome. Flying from Narrabri to Sydney on a late evening service a gentleman in the back row was consuming his own alcohol without our knowledge. He then repeatedly punch the bulkhead behind him in a psychotic state. He was abusing and terrifying the passengers around him. The situation was defused by moving passengers away and engaging with this man. Two crew members were essential, one to calm the man down and assess the threat level a one to consider the safety of the other passengers and react accordingly.

....pax was distressed and inconsolable due to mothers death, cabin crew had to deal with that customer, very difficult as only 2 FA left in economy

....more situations to diffuse due to cabin crew shortage

....Being up the front alone is also a security issue when cabin crew are to enter the flight deck, or when pilots need to come out and use the washroom facilities. On the shorter sectors it is almost impossible to have the time to have a second crew member present when entering the flight deck to give the tech crew their meals etc.

....I think that having one less crew member up the front puts strain and stress on the Cabin Manager (speaking from experience) particularly on the shorter sectors. Corners are then likely to be cut causing possible security and safety issues onboard

Hand Luggage:

....trying to organise excess hand baggage for passengers is very challenging and consequently, stressful. This is an aspect of our job we as crew believe is genuinely compromised by the loss of the 5th crew member.

....excessive hand luggage not off-loaded to maintain OTD (on time departure)

....difficulty in stowing excess luggage in economy due to aircraft economy config and cabin crew shortage.

.... A "MAJOR" issue especially on SYD & BNE flights. Crew are constantly having to try and find space to stow luggage, resulting in them not always being able to stay at their assigned duty areas, thus risking safety in the event of an on ground evacuation (especially whilst refuelling)

....because of new check in systems, customers are bringing more luggage with them onboard.

...With Virgin the hand luggage is not managed on the ground successfully, in fact it is atrocious. Everybody overlooks it as if they ignore it then somebody else will handle it.

Emergency Readiness:

...The crew's confidence in being able to evacuate an aircraft was greatly diminished.

...This particular A/c (Dash 8 300) has 5 exits, 2 at the Forward of the aircraft, 2 at row 10 and a service door at the aft. When reduced to a single operator, and an emergency evacuation was initiated I'm not at all certain that a crew member responsible for the exits at row 1 would be effective at assisting passengers escape quickly at Row 12.

...Crew were concerned about being able to properly handle an emergency situation if it occurred during the flight.

...Job satisfaction is at an all time low as the profession of being Cabin Crew is becoming eroded and whilst safety is touted as the main cause of Cabin Crew being on board they are being overloaded with a lot of other issues.

...How in the right mind of any human being can they believe that reducing the crew complement to the point where there are three crew to operate 4 main doors on an aircraft would work?

...I worked for Skywest and they too want the crew compliment reduced from 3 to 2 on the F100 which would be a nightmare in an Emergency situation.

... on the B717, there are 2 crew seats up the front were No1cc and No3cc are seated, but in the case off an evacuation No3cc is to go to the overwing exits and direct the evacuation from there. No1cc is responsible for the 2 forward doors. In case of No1cc being incapacitated, then No3 cc will be responsible for both forward doors and the passengers are then responsible for open the 4 exits at the overwings.

Communication:

...Cabin Crew at rear of aircraft often unaware who is Capt/First Officer due to time pressure on turn arounds/crew changes, resulting in reduced communication between Flight deck and Cabin.

... Communication is the "glue" that holds all of this together. As a result, communication with our colleagues is not a preferred approach to our vocation but a vital and extremely necessary aspect of it. I can honestly say that there are times

when I believe we are less than perfect in this regard and this due to the increase in duties we all now have.

....There were breakdowns in communication between crew

Entire experience included below -

The following are my experiences flying under the reduced crew ratio as a domestic flight attendant with Jetstar.

We work in an extremely stressful environment because the cabin crew\passenger ratio is too low.

I have outlined some of the issues we face on an ongoing basis as follows:

Overall is not humanly possible to perform the list of duties and tasks the company requires and we are under constant pressure to achieve on time performance, it is almost like a company fixation or obsession, often times at the expense of safety.

1. We are pressured to rush whilst doing our safety and security checks, this creates a lot of stress and I have seen some flight attendants and Cabin Managers not complete the required safety and security checks in line with CASA regulations for the sake of attempting to ensure on time performance. These safety breaches could have disastrous results for obvious reasons, such as a bomb on board that is not seen during the checks.

2. Due to constantly rushing we suffer from a lot of stress, cabin crew voice these concerns to management but only ever receive catch phrase responses from management such as " we're looking into it". and "safety is our priority". These are hollow responses designed to fob us off. Eventually crew loose faith that the company really cares about their grave safety concerns and the only thing crew have left is to vent these issues to each other as our contracts disallow us talking to the media about our work environments. This contributes to an extremely negative and toxic work environment from sign on until sign off and unfortunately a lot of crew are unable to switch off after work as they are overloaded so the issues are still with them in what is meant to be rest time or family time.

2. I have done many flights that were so busy I didn't have time to eat anything. I have even done four sector days where I didn't even time for a quick cup of tea. We are required to be well groomed but with all good intentions I very frequently don't even have time to reapply my lipstick.

There are many consequences of being this busy some include the following:

3. We rush in an unsafe manner to collect rubbish and clean plane on after passengers have disembarked. This cleaning is extremely physical and this combined with rushing greatly increases the risks of injuries.

4. Many crew are snappy to customers or not as nice to them if they were not to stressed and fatigued-this results in customer dissatisfaction and an an increased risk of assault, verbal abuse or threatening behavior by passengers.

5. Crew often experience symptoms of hunger or thirst but are not able to deal with their bodily needs as they are too busy. Sometimes only when the person feels faint (from lack of food) or has a headache (from lack of water) are they forced to sit down and have something to eat or drink. Also crew often don't have time to use the lavatory.

6. I personally find that after a busy shift I actually feel overtired. As I consequence I feel unsafe driving home but then experience insomnia because it takes much longer to unwind after a busy shift. For example the shift may end at 1 a.m. It takes an hour to get home, once there I have a shower and need at least an hour to unwind otherwise I'll go to bed but just lie there awake as I'm still revved up from being so busy. So, by the time I get to bed it's 3 a.m. My family have commented that all I do is work and sleep and family relationships have suffered as a result.

7. I have concerns for my safety when driving home after a busy shift as I know I'm not as alert as I should be, I also have concerns about my co-workers safety whilst driving.

8. As we work so hard we get run down easier then have to take sick leave which can be costly because of missed pay as well as having to visit the doctors and possibly pay for medication.

9. The company are trying to improve the sick leave levels as they are extremely high, their solution is to ask the crew member with high sick leave to come into the office earlier than their sign on time to discuss the issues. The crew member then misses out on more personal time as they are required to attend these meetings on their own time.

10. As the shifts are so long, up to 12 hours on my contract and more for Team Jetstar, crew sometimes come to work healthy only to get sick during the duty. This results in delays which result in the remaining crew having to work longer hours. If the shift always had five crew members these delays would not happen. Crew are also pressured to work over and above their allowed hours which can have dire safety implications for them and their passengers. I have heard some crew say they were so tired they couldn't disarm the doors effectively, or they forgot if they did their emergency exit briefing.

The increased risk in safety issues to passengers include:

11. Some passengers not evacuating in time in the event of an emergency as their are not enough crew to assist during the evacuation.

12. Not enough crew to assist in a medical emergency, handling an abusive or mentally impaired passenger, a decompression, a hi-jacking or a fire on board.

Crew want action on these matters but feel as though they don't have a voice.

Crew have confided in me that they are sometimes so stressed go home after work and cry in the shower. It is stressful to hear crew talk like this. I have sometimes compared my current work situation to that of workers in third world countries as a sort self talk to give me the strength to get through a busy shift. Then I've thought "hold on a minute I shouldn't have to compare my work environment to that of a third worker to get myself through as this is Australia and it's meant to be a fair and lucky country."

We trust the above examples, whilst only a snapshot, indicate to the Committee what impact the exemptions that CASA has given is having on Aviation Safety and Security in this country already.

Submitted by:

Jo Ann Davidson
National Secretary

Carol Locket
National Convenor
Occupational Health & Safety