

MEDIA RELEASE

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QANTAS PILOTS REJECT PLAN TO HIRE FOREIGN PILOTS

The Australian and International Pilots Association (AIPA) does not agree that the purported pilot shortage in Australia is sufficient to warrant an agreement struck between Qantas and the Federal Government to relax restrictions on skilled work visas.

AIPA President Captain Murray Butt said pilots wanted the Federal Government to produce the evidence used to assess the purported skill shortage. He said AIPA rejected the assertion that there were insufficient numbers of capable Australian candidates to fill the positions.

“Qantas should not have been granted a special deal to hire foreign pilots before properly testing the labour market,” Captain Butt said.

“The airline is offering prospective recruits salaries as low as \$65,000 a year after candidates have spent as much as \$150,000 each to complete their training,” he said.

“If there is a real pilot shortage of Australian applicants, and AIPA has serious doubts, it has come about because the aviation employers have sat on their hands and done nothing to address the impending supply side problem. Collectively, they have made aviation a relatively unattractive career.”

Captain Butt said Qantas had admitted in a submission to the Federal Government that there were suitable candidates within Australia but not enough candidates to meet expected needs and flying standards.

“Our view is that this is little more than a smoke screen for Qantas to make sure it keeps pilot salaries as low as possible,”

“These kinds of special deals for individual employers are supposed to cover skilled overseas workers where there is a demonstrated need that can’t be met in the Australian labour market.”

He said AIPA considers this TSS visa approach by Qantas to be an abuse of process, designed to substitute Commonwealth benefits as inducements to employ people on terms and conditions that apparently have otherwise proved to be unattractive and inadequate to Australian pilots. Apparently, the prospect of permanent residency overcomes a lot of other concerns for foreign applicants.

“We are calling on the Department of Home Affairs to produce the evidence used to assess the purported skill shortage,” Captain Butt said.

“Qantas is offering pilot recruits less than the average rates being paid to bus drivers in Sydney and expecting them to perform highly skilled work at unacceptably low rates of pay.”

He said we should learn from the previous US commercial aviation industry experience. Salaries had been pushed down to the point where pilots were forced to reside so far away from airports they were subjected to dangerous levels of fatigue once they took off.

“This kind of race to the bottom caused a fatal crash in the US and a rethink by the Industry. We don’t want our aviation safety record in Australia to be compromised,” he said.

“We are also concerned about the quality of pilots Qantas will be recruiting at the rates they are offering.”

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