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Deskilling of aviation workers is dangerous for safety and economy

The aviation industry directly and indirectly employs hundreds of thousands of Australians, and was one of the hardest hit industries by the pandemic. However the ACTU will today tell a senate inquiry that problems were well established prior to 2020.

The Morrison Government has ignored the crisis within Australia's aviation sector for years, and this complete disinterest has hurt workers and left the sector vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis.

Aviation workers are being forced to do more work in less time, and less skilled workers were being brought in over higher skilled ones as a cost saving measure. In time, the submission states, this leads to a weakening of those vital skills which would be felt across the entire Australian workforce.

In addition to government inaction, neglect of staff, and the potential of offshoring maintenance jobs could lead to compromised safety for workers and passengers.

Recommendations outlined in the ACTU's submission to the inquiry included the establishment of the Safe and Secure Skies Commission – a body comprising of government, employers, unions and airports, which would be given the ability to make enforceable orders regarding safety.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Scott Connolly,

“Serious issues have existed within the aviation sector long before the pandemic hit and the Morrison Government is failing to respond in a meaningful way. In fact, aviation workers have suffered from stand-downs with no pay, and exclusion from programs like JobKeeper.

“The skills deficit in the aviation industry has very real consequences, particularly in regards to safety. Shifting away from skilled workers as a cost-cutting measure is irresponsible and - as well as being dangerous - will mean a less skilled Australian workforce.

“With the assistance of Government support and funding, the Australian aviation industry could provide highly marketable skills and qualifications that could bolster Australia's economy especially as we head into recovery from the pandemic.

“As well as being the responsibility of the Federal Government, employers also need to be held to account. It is employers, not workers, who should shoulder the burden of rebuilding the industry.”

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