

Shameful conduct sees Qantas fined \$250k

Today, the District Court of NSW imposed a \$250,000 penalty on Qantas for unlawfully standing down Theo Seremetidis, a former health and safety representative who raised concerns about worker safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Judge Russell SC DCJ said "the conduct of Qantas is shameful" and justified his verdict on the basis that the offences have "significant culpability" and that there was a "gross power imbalance" between Qantas and the HSR.

The landmark case is the first time in Australian labour history that a major airline has been criminally prosecuted for breaching workplace safety regulations.

The \$250,000 fine follows an investigation by SafeWork NSW after safety issues were raised by the Transport Workers Union. Theo was stood down after fulfilling his legal rights under the Work Health and Safety Act by raising serious health and safety concerns, such as the company's practice of making workers clean planes arriving from COVID hotspots without appropriate personal protective equipment, COVID-safe training, or adequate disinfectant measures.

The fine comes as Qantas recently announced post-tax profits of \$873 million in the six months to December 2023.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

"Qantas used to be an airline we were proud to call our own, but they have shown us time and time again that they are more concerned about their profits than the lives and wellbeing of their workers. Qantas has a big job on its hands if it wants to get the spirit back into the Spirit of Australia.

"Theo's case should send a message to all corporations that you can't ignore the health and safety of your workers without consequences. Congratulations to the Transport Workers Union for their unwavering support of Theo and their commitment to the health and safety of all their members."

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Media Contact: Cameron Warasta 0447 159 467