

QF 035/2007

16 JULY 2007

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TO: QANTAS AND FORSTAFF MEMBERS

RE: OVERSEAS MAINTENANCE

The ALAEA were recently advised by members that Qantas intended to send a number of aircraft overseas in the second half of 2007 for heavy maintenance. After approaches to the airline it was confirmed that aircraft VH-OJE could not be accommodated within Australia due to labour shortages and line slippage and would be sent to Singapore later this month.

As has always been the case we indicated to the airline our objection and concern regarding the lack of consultation with our Association regarding the offshoring option. Whilst opportunities remain within Australia to maintain these aircraft, it is only at the twelfth hour that the ALAEA is informed by the airline that decisions have been made that exclude productive discussions on retaining work in Australia. The process for timely consultation or lack thereof, has grown all too predictable and the ALAEA will be taking a new approach to outsourcing by going public with our concerns about safety and the dismantling of the aircraft maintenance industry within Australia.

As a result of being approached by a Today Tonight journalist an ALAEA official and others will be appearing to comment on the merits of outsourcing Qantas maintenance overseas. Members may wish to tune to Channel 7 this evening at 1830 for the program. Additionally a press release will be issued to generate further debate on the topic in the public forum over the next week. Members should continue to contact our office should information of interest arise on aircraft maintained overseas.

On a more positive note it is with considerable pride that Engineers at the Avalon site have completed a 747 D1 check in record-breaking time with limited manpower and resources. The aircraft VH-OJT was turned around on the 9th of July, in time (35 days) and under budget with no known maintenance quality issues.

In the interim the ALAEA has written to Qantas seeking urgent talks about the cycle of offshoring and the lack of investment in Australian facilities, skills training and keeping the work in Australia for current and future generations benefit. A commitment was made public by Geoff Dixon when Sydney HM was closed just over 12 months ago with the following statements –

“Heavy Maintenance for Qantas’ Boeing 747 fleet transferred from Sydney to the airline’s base in Avalon, Victoria, with an increase in employment opportunities at Avalon;

A commitment to retain a comprehensive apprentice program for the training of future aviation engineers in Australia.”

“To undertake supervise and certify for the safety of all who fly.”

And assurance backed by the Honourable Warren Truss MP and Minister for Transport and Regional Services in March 2006 –

“The Qantas Board’s decision to retain its aeronautical maintenance sites in Australia is vital to uphold our reputation as a world-leader in aviation and to sustain our military aviation source capability.

The recently announced outcomes of the Government’s international aviation policy review were under-pinned, among other things, by a belief that Australia needs a strong local aviation industry.

Mr Truss said the Government particularly welcomed Qantas’ commitment to retain a comprehensive apprentice programme for the training of future aviation engineers in Australia.

This is great news for young people wanting to gain these skills and also for the future of Australia’s aeronautical maintenance and repair industry.”

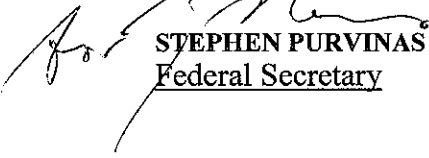
From what has transpired since last March a closer look at the news reveals that it isn’t so great for the future of the industry. Since then Qantas has reduced apprentice numbers to less than 200 and down from it’s height of over 1000 earlier this decade. The apprentice Instructor position has been made redundant resulting in the loss of 11 Instructors with a further 7 transferred within the airline to other positions. At Avalon the commitment by Qantas to increase Qantas supervision has dissipated and current numbers remain around 65; Forstaff workforce has decreased from around 832 at its peak in 2005/6 to approximately 750 as Qantas and Forstaff employees leaving have not been replaced.

The 484 Aircraft positions including 256 Sydney Heavy Maintenance LAME jobs made redundant due to the closure have seen a rapid reduction of skills within Australia. Many of those forced out of Qantas at that time have not returned to the industry. As a result aircraft Type Training has greatly reduced further exacerbating the dismemberment of the Maintenance Industry by the current Qantas management team. Current Qantas Engineering management’s cost cutting drive is going much too far and cutting deeply into the core expertise necessary for the airline to function optimally.

The past 12 months have seen more LAMEs at Qantas trained in “Leadership” on camps where kayaking, tent maintenance and rope bridge building occurs rather than new aircraft licence training or skills maintenance. The net result of this style of leadership was relayed recently to our office by a concerned LAME who passed on this message from his DMM –

“Qantas used to be 95% ability and 5 % company. Well that’s changed. It’s now 5% ability and 95% company”.

It is the ability and knowhow of Qantas engineers that made Qantas a world leader in aircraft maintenance and the safety of the airline and it is that ability and safety quality we are fighting to retain today.


STEPHEN PURVINAS
Federal Secretary