



# **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

## **FLIGHT ATTENDANTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**

### **(Domestic/Regional Division)**

17 August, 2007

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Attention All Domestic/Regional Flight Attendants

## **CABIN CREW TO PASSENGER RATIO**

### **'CREW BACK DOORED'**

In 2003, the issue of cabin crew to passenger ratio was fully examined by CASA in response to airlines to have the 1:50 ratio incorporated within the new Australian Civil Aviation Safety Regulations. At the time, the FAAA made representations to the appropriate regulatory authorities, government bodies and politicians. CASA was not able to identify shortcomings with the current Australian 1:36 regulation and Parliament ordered that the Australian law not be changed (Aviation Minister John Anderson).

So what has happened since Parliament last determined that the higher 1:36 ratio was the appropriate safety standard for Australia?

- In August last year, the Mutual Recognition Bill passed through Parliament. The effect of this is that New Zealand carriers can operate domestically within Australia with 1:50 cabin crew to passenger ratio, rather than the Australian standard of 1:36.
- Since this Bill was passed, 4 airlines, Virgin Blue, Pacific Blue, Jetstar and most recently Qantas have now made requests to CASA to provide a variation to the law in respect of the minimum number of cabin crew permitted to operate on particular aircraft types, in particular, B737-800 and A320 aircraft.
- These exemptions requests (dispensations) have either been or in the process of being granted by CASA.
- The exemptions do not change the Australian law, but rather vary it in order to allow these specific aircraft to operate with 4 crew rather than 5.
- It appears CASA has utilised a process to grant these exemptions bypassing consultation with any public stakeholder including the industry Standards Consultative Committee and the FAAA.
- As far as can be determined, no new safety case has been presented by the operators since the 2003 review in order to justify this exemption. Rather, the driving force appears to be for commercial benefit rather than any safety consideration.

As the B737-800 and A320 aircraft constitute a large portion of the nation's airlines fleet, a significant number of aircraft are now operating pursuant to a dispensation to the law. Besides the safety concerns, the FAAA also has serious concerns regarding the process used to facilitate these exemptions.

If the Australian safety standard is to be changed, then let's have the matter properly re-examined by all interested parties, and not changed by a 'back door' approach. This examination should properly consider safety issues in an open forum and not behind closed doors. Should this not occur, then it is open to argument that any change to the cabin crew ratio is commercially motivated.

Members should note that the review on crew ratio conducted in 2003 was absolutely focused on safety given the serious security incident on Qantaslink. Let's hope it doesn't take another such incident to bring safety in cabin crew numbers back to the forefront of airlines considerations.

The Association is seeking responses from the relevant authorities as to the appropriateness of this process and the underlying basis for the exemptions. We will advise members accordingly.

This newsletter was written and authorised by **Jo Ann Davidson**, Divisional Secretary and **John Playford**, Manager Industrial Relations