

Transport Workers' Union of Australia

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National Secretary
Michael Kaine

27 June 2021

Prime Minister Hon Scott Morrison MP

By email: Scott.Morrison.MP@aph.gov.au

cc Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Hon Barnaby Joyce MP: Barnaby.Joyce.MP@aph.gov.au

cc Minister for Health Hon Greg Hunt MP: Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister,

As you know, the Transport Workers Union (TWU) represents workers across the aviation sector. We write regarding the concerning contraction of COVID-19 by a domestic flight attendant and ongoing risk to aviation workers, passengers and communities. **Domestic cabin crew must be urgently added to the vaccination priority list and provided with rapid access to the vaccine.**

Over the last four months, the inefficiency of the vaccination rollout, including the paucity of doses, has effectively pitted groups of critical workers to compete with each other for priority. This has resulted in the dangerous exclusion of frontline domestic flight crew. As a consequence, there are now 70 aviation workers in emergency isolation at a cost to Virgin and hundreds of passengers and their families across multiple states potentially exposed to the Delta strain.

As the situation unfolds, we fear the exponential increase of cases because of lack of vaccine access by all essential workers, including those flying interstate in packed aircraft cabins throughout a pandemic. The TWU, the ACTU and Virgin have appealed to the Federal Government several times for flight crew to be prioritised for vaccination and we urge you to act upon this request immediately. It is also critical that there is national leadership on mandating rapid testing for these workers ahead of and after shift.

Aviation workers and transport workers more broadly do an important job keeping Australians and businesses connected. They have become the unwitting subject of a political blame game which over the last week included an air transportation driver brutally scapegoated for the failed vaccination programme and unaddressed gaps in biosecurity. Rather than condemning essential workers the focus must be on mitigating risks, especially for workers in such necessarily confined physical quarters to the community in a service designed to disperse those community members across the entire nation.

We have been raising for months the need for a national plan for aviation to deal with both the health of workers and the community with whom they are in such close contact and also the viability of aviation businesses which are so critical for the economic stability of the nation. Despite repeated approaches no such plan has been put in place.

It is time to act. Please confirm immediately that relevant directions will be made by the Federal Government to place domestic flight crew into the highest priority category for vaccination and that appropriate pre and post flight rapid testing will also be required. It is exasperating and dangerous that such a direction has not to date been given.

We also request a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss the need for a national aviation plan.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Kaine', is located below the text 'Yours faithfully,'.

Michael Kaine
National Secretary, Transport Workers' Union