

Transport Workers' Union of Australia

National Office

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www.twu.com.au

National Secretary
Michael Kaine

30 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,

This correspondence follows a letter we wrote to you on June 27th regarding our concerns of COVID-19 contraction through domestic aviation. As you will be aware, this situation has worsened with more exposure flights identified and hundreds of thousands of people affected. It is therefore essential that the following safety measures be actioned immediately:

- **frontline domestic cabin crew must be provided priority access to the vaccine; and**
- **rapid antigen pre-flight testing must be introduced for both passengers and flight crew**

We have grave concerns over the Federal Government's failure to act on the threat posed by a domestic aviation industry which lacks these two important safety measures.

Australians are currently experiencing the colossal fallout of flight crew and passengers unknowingly transporting the highly contagious Delta variant across states and into regional communities. The positive cases of a second flight attendant and unrelated passenger who flew on Virgin flights while infectious have extended exposure risk to the Gold Coast and Townsville, forcing hundreds of thousands of people into lockdown and causing testing queue wait times of up to 12 hours.

This is a disaster which could have been prevented.

A combination of priority vaccination of flight crew and rapid antigen pre-flight testing would have mitigated the risk of domestic aviation becoming a super-spreader industry.

Several rapid antigen tests (RATs) have been approved for use in Australia by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Dozens of airports around the world including in the UK, USA, France, Germany and Turkey have had RATs available in their terminals since as long ago as October. Much like the botched vaccine rollout, Australia is far behind in utilising this opportunity to plug the gaps in aviation biosecurity.

Not only would these measures greatly enhance the safety of our nation, they would support the aviation industry by providing peace of mind to passengers and flight crew confined to tightly packed cabins which do not allow for social distancing.

It was disappointing that National Cabinet on Monday failed to rectify the inexplicable exclusion of domestic cabin crew from priority vaccination lists, which TWU members have been calling for since the programme began. We note that National Cabinet agreed to seek advice from AHPPC on COVID-19 vaccinations for aviation and urge you to action this immediately. Further delays to vaccine priority and pre-flight testing will undoubtedly lead Australia to more snap lockdowns and an abundance of communities being afflicted by covid outbreaks related to the Delta strain.

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In our last letter, we raised 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. We request a meeting to advance this great need for national leadership to secure the future of aviation.

Please confirm immediately by return letter that the Federal Government will urgently act to ensure domestic cabin crew are given the highest priority and access to the vaccine and that rapid pre-flight testing for passengers and flight crew will be mandated with urgency.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Kaine', is positioned below the closing salutation.

Michael Kaine
National Secretary, Transport Workers' Union