



# FLIGHT ATTENDANTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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## SUBMISSION TO THE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Australia's aviation sector – regional service delivery - QantasLink base closures

**Submitted by:** Flight Attendants' Association of Australia (FAAA)

**Date:** 24 November 2025

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#### PART 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Flight Attendants' Association of Australia (FAAA) thanks the Senators of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee the opportunity for providing this submission.

The FAAA made it clear to Qantas as a matter of principle that we opposed the base closures and to explore opportunities where cabin crew could continue in their respective bases. However, it became apparent that anything other than taking a pragmatic approach would leave members far worse off. We embarked on a process of negotiating the best possible outcome for our members.

1.1 This submission addresses the decision by Qantas Airways Limited, announced on 1 October 2025, to permanently close its regional cabin crew bases located in **Hobart (Tasmania), Canberra (ACT), and Mildura (Victoria)**.

1.2 The closure affects thirty-one (31) cabin crew employed across three distinct Qantas Group entities: **National Jet Systems Pty Ltd (NJS), National Jet Operations Services Pty Ltd (NJOS), and Eastern Australia Airlines Pty Ltd (Eastern)**.

1.3 The FAAA contends that this decision, effective from 19 April 2026, disproportionately impacts long-serving regional employees who are deeply embedded in their local communities. Contrary to the airline's assertion that the workforce is mobile, survey data indicates that the vast majority of affected staff face insurmountable barriers to relocation, including home ownership, spousal business ownership, and critical caring responsibilities for vulnerable dependents.

1.4 Furthermore, the industrial instruments governing these employees contained significant disparities. Specifically, employees of Eastern Australia Airlines had **no contractual entitlement** to employer-funded relocation. Without the intervention of the FAAA, these employees faced a forced relocation with zero financial support.

1.5 Through intensive negotiation, the FAAA secured a **Heads of Agreement (HOA)** on 3 November 2025. This agreement secured: a **Separation Payment** of \$20,000 (gross) for those unable to move, a payment Qantas initially claimed was "not applicable because no one was being made redundant"; a **Commuter Support Package** valued at \$36,000; and **Relocation Support** valued at \$36,000 on top of relocation assistance under the NJS and NJOS enterprise agreements. Furthermore, FAAA Federal Secretary Teri O'Toole successfully negotiated the provision of accommodation for regional crew transferring to Qantas Long Haul roles during their initial training period.

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## PART 2: CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

**10 September 2025:** Qantas management announces a strategic review of its cabin and flight crew base footprint. The review specifically targets the "smaller bases" of Mildura, Canberra, and Hobart, citing that they are "not expected to grow under current network plans".

**18–22 September 2025:** Anticipating the impact of a potential closure, the FAAA conducts a rapid survey of its membership in the affected bases. 18 detailed responses are received, providing a demographic snapshot of a workforce with deep community ties.

**16 September 2025 (First meeting with Qantas):** Qantas did a PowerPoint point presentation detailing its main reasons for closing the bases were "efficiencies and loss of productivity". It did emphasise "No decisions have been made."

**22 September 2025 (Second meeting with Qantas):** The FAAA provided a list of questions (based on the survey results) to Qantas who advised "Nothing is a hard No or Yes" and took the questions on notice. Qantas' position "There is work for everyone you will not be paid a redundancy." AND "We can't create long haul positions currently long haul is recruiting from a two-year waiting list."

**30 September 2025 (Letters to Parliamentarians):** The FAAA sent letters seeking urgent intervention to protect Hobart jobs to Premier Rockliff and Minister Howlett. To date the FAAA has received no response. The emailed letter copied in Senator Lambie who did respond, and Senator Lambie also sent a letter to Vanessa Hudson, Qantas. Senator Lambie also contacted Senator Pocock who also wrote to Vanessa Hudson.

**1 October 2025 (The Decision):** Mr. Nick Collie, QantasLink executive, issues correspondence to all staff confirming the decision to close the bases.

- **Closure Date:** Confirmed for 19 April 2026.
- **Initial Redundancy Stance:** In the "Employee Q&A" document released the same day, Qantas explicitly states: "*Redundancies are not applicable in this circumstance under the EBAs*". The airline argues that because "ongoing work" is available in major cities, no redundancy is payable.

**2 and 3 October 2025 (Member meetings):** The FAAA met with members from Canberra and Hobart bases. Cabin crew gave us questions to ask Qantas and claims to put to Qantas at the 8 October 2025 meeting.

**8 October 2025 (Third meeting with Qantas):** Qantas advise "Under the EAs we have an ability for base transfers, but we recognise that may be difficult for this group." It then advised of three support options: Transfer package; Commuting package; and Separation payment. The FAAA presented to Qantas the members questions and claims which were responded to or taken on notice.

**9 October 2025:** FAAA Assistant President (Domestic) Ray Amhaz attends the Canberra base. Crew feedback indicates that while 2-3 crew may move, the majority are undecided or unable to relocate due to family constraints.

**10 October 2025:** FAAA National Secretary Teri O'Toole attends the Hobart base. Members raise critical concerns regarding the viability of commuting, the loss of local consultative representation, and the impact on flexible working arrangements for parents.

**14 October 2025 (Final consultation meeting):** Between the FAAA and Qantas management to address the "further claims" raised by members during the base visits.

**15 October 2025:** Qantas provides a written draft Heads of Agreement. The FAAA rejects elements of the draft and pushes for stronger protections for those resigning, those transferring to Long Haul and cabin crew trainers who will commute.

**22 October 2025:** The "Qantas Information Pack" document is distributed to cabin crew, outlining the agreed terms for the Separation Payment, Commuter Support, Relocation Assistance, and Redeployment Assistance.

**22 and 23 October 2025 (Member meetings):** The Qantas Information Pack details "trainers when commuting to conduct training at their new base would have their accommodation costs paid for training that is 5 days or more." There are ten (10) cabin crew who are also trainers from Hobart and Canberra. The FAAA met with them and their major concern is the Commuter Package would not cover cost of accommodation when training. The FAAA pressed Qantas to reduce the 5 days to 3 days, but Qantas would not agree.

**3 November 2025:** The Heads of Agreement is formally signed by representatives of NJS, NJOS, Eastern, and the FAAA, legally codifying the new protections.

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### **PART 3: THE QANTAS BUSINESS CASE VERSUS OPERATIONAL REALITY**

**3.1 Qantas's Stated Rationale** from presentation documents obtained by the FAAA reveal that Qantas justified the closures based on operational "inefficiency" rather than performance.

- **Fixed Costs:** The airline cited the "fixed costs of running the bases" as a primary driver.
- **Rostering Inefficiency:** Management argued that small bases suffer from "inefficient" leave allocation and required higher levels of reserve coverage per pilot/flight attendant.
- **Productivity:** The airline claimed, "lost productivity from paxing (being a passenger on an aircraft) crew to main bases for recurrency training".

**3.2 Performance Admission** It is the submission of the FAAA that these closures are not a reflection of the workforce's dedication. In their Town Hall on 1 October 2025 to cabin crew, Qantas management said:

*"The review is not based on past performance. Hobart, Canberra, and Mildura have delivered excellent service."*

**3.3 The Union's Position** The FAAA submits that "efficiency" metrics fail to account for the operational resilience provided by regional bases. During major weather events or disruptions in capital cities (Sydney/Melbourne), regional crews often provide the only continuity of service for their local communities. Centralising all crew to major hubs increases the risk of total network paralysis during hub-centric disruptions.

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## PART 4: THE HUMAN COST (SURVEY EVIDENCE)

The FAAA rejects the assertion that relocation is a simple matter of "mobility" for this workforce. The survey data reveals a demographic profile that makes forced relocation financially and socially destructive.

**4.1 Tenure and Stability** The affected crew are not transient junior employees.

- **11 out of 18** respondents have lived in their current location for **over 20 years**.
- **12 out of 18** respondents **own their own homes**. In the current economic climate, forcing these employees to sell in a regional market and buy into the Sydney or Brisbane market (where median house prices are significantly higher) is a recipe for financial ruin.

**4.2 The "Spouse Factor" (Economic Anchors)** Perhaps the most critical barrier to relocation identified was spousal employment.

- **14 respondents** live with a partner.
- **10 partners own a local business**.
- *Impact Analysis:* A local plumbing business, tourism venture, or retail store in Hobart cannot simply be "relocated" to Brisbane. For these 10 families, the Qantas demand to "relocate" effectively requires the destruction of the partner's livelihood.

**4.3 Vulnerable Dependents (Caring Responsibilities)** Relocation implies the abandonment of vulnerable family members for whom the crew member is the primary carer.

- **Elderly Parents:** 8 respondents care for elderly parents.
  - *Case Study: Natasha (Hobart)* is a single income earner. Both her parents are in their 80s with chronic health issues. She is their sole support network. Relocation is impossible.
  - *Case Study: Felix (Hobart)* supports a 74-year-old father living alone with no other family in the state.
- **Children with Disabilities:** 6 respondents care for children with disabilities.
  - *Case Study: Katherine (Hobart)* has a child requiring specific local speech and physio therapists. Moving would sever a critical, established medical care network.
  - *Case Study: Paul (Hobart)* is a foster carer for "Kennerly Kids" and cares for a sister with cancer.

**4.4 "Asset Traps"** Beyond housing, members own significant assets that are costly or impossible to move.

- **5 respondents** own boats.
- **7 respondents** own trailers.
- **3 respondents** own caravans.
- **16 respondents** own animals and the majority have more than one.
- **1 respondent** (Michelle) owns an aged horse (31 years old) that cannot be easily transported or re-registered.

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## PART 5: INDUSTRIAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

The Senate must understand the legal vulnerability of these workers prior to the FAAA's intervention. The existing Enterprise Agreements (EAs) contained significant gaps that Qantas initially sought to exploit.

### 5.1 Relocation Rights A severe disparity existed between the agreements regarding base transfers.

- **NJS EA (Clause 49) & NJOS EA (Clause 5.10):** These agreements explicitly obligated the Company to pay for moving personal effects, one car, storage (30 days), insurance, and temporary accommodation if a transfer was directed by the Company .
- **Eastern Australia Airlines EA:** This agreement was **silent** on Company-directed permanent transfers. It contained **no express provision** compelling Qantas to pay for removalists, flights, or temporary accommodation for Eastern crew in Mildura.
  - *Risk:* Without the FAAA negotiating the Heads of Agreement, Eastern crew faced the prospect of being ordered to relocate to Melbourne at their own personal expense.

### 5.2 The "Redundancy Loophole" Qantas initially refused to pay redundancy, relying on "Alternative Employment" clauses.

- **NJS EA Clause 24.5.1:** States that the Company can apply to the Fair Work Commission to vary severance pay if it obtains "acceptable alternative employment" for the crew member .
- **NJOS EA Clause 9.3.3.1.1:** States: *"If NJOS find for the Cabin Crew member acceptable alternative employment, NJOS will not be obliged to pay severance pay"*.
- **The Dispute:** Qantas argued that a job in Sydney was "acceptable alternative employment" for a Hobart resident. The FAAA argued that for a person with a mortgage and a partner with a local business in Hobart, a job in Sydney is **not** an acceptable alternative.

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## PART 6: NEGOTIATED OUTCOMES (HEADS OF AGREEMENT)

On 3 November 2025, the FAAA secured a Heads of Agreement that overrode these EA limitations and provided a robust safety net.

### 6.1 The Separation Payment (The "Redundancy" Substitute) Despite Qantas's initial refusal to pay redundancy, the FAAA secured a **Separation Payment** for those choosing to resign.

- **Amount: \$20,000 (gross)** lump sum.
- **Comparison:** FAAA analysis confirmed this amount exceeded the statutory redundancy entitlement for many staff. For example:
  - Eastern Level 4 (10+ years service): Statutory Redundancy = \$13,696.
  - NJS New Crew (6 years service): Statutory Redundancy = \$12,041 .
  - **Outcome:** Staff leaving the business received a higher payout than they would have under a standard redundancy process.

### 6.2 The Commuter Support Package For staff unable to move but willing to commute, a 2-year support package was secured (20 April 2026 – 19 April 2028).

- **Allowance: \$700 per fortnight** (taxed) to cover accommodation/meals in the new base.
- **Total Value: \$36,400 (gross)** over the 2-year term.
- **Travel:** Confirmed Economy class staff travel for positioning to/from the new base.
- **Rostering:** A commitment to manually build "commuter-friendly" rosters to minimise "home reserve" and "single days off", reducing the frequency of the commute.

### 6.3 Permanent Relocation Support For those able to relocate, the FAAA secured entitlements significantly above the EA minimums.

- **Relocation Payment:** A **\$36,400 (gross)** lump sum to cover incidental costs (bond, stamp duty, pet transport).

- **Eastern Crew Protection:** Clause 2(f) of the HOA explicitly extends NJS/NJOS moving entitlements to Eastern crew, closing the contractual gap.
- **Housing Support:** Paid leave to view properties and assistance from the Qantas Global Mobility team .

#### **6.4 Redeployment to Qantas Long Haul** A critical pathway for career progression was secured.

- **Priority EOI:** Impacted crew were given priority access to express interest in Qantas Long Haul positions in Sydney.
- **Accommodation during Training (The "Teri O'Toole Clause"):**
  - *Issue:* Regional crew transferring to Long Haul are required to attend a 6-week training course in Sydney. The cost of 6 weeks of accommodation in Sydney is prohibitive for a regional worker.
  - *Outcome:* FAAA Federal Secretary Teri O'Toole successfully negotiated that **accommodation will be provided by the Company** for the duration of this initial training. This removed the single biggest financial barrier to career progression for regional staff.

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## **PART 7: CONCLUSION**

7.1 The decision to close the Hobart, Canberra, and Mildura bases is a commercial decision by Qantas that carries a profound human cost. It treats loyal, long-serving regional staff as transferable assets, ignoring the complex web of family, economic, and social ties that bind them to their communities.

7.2 While the FAAA successfully negotiated a Heads of Agreement that provides significant financial mitigation—specifically the \$20,000 separation payment, the \$36,400 commuter allowance, and the inclusion of Eastern crew—money cannot replace the presence of a parent for the care of a child.

7.3 The Senate Committee is urged to consider that for the 10 survey respondents whose partners own local businesses, or the 8 respondents caring for elderly parents, the "choice" offered by Qantas—relocate or resign—was never a genuine choice. It was an ultimatum.

7.4 The Senate Committee should also consider the loss of skills in relation to the cabin crew who are also trainers. Qantas's offer to pay for accommodation for training that is 5 days or more simply does not work. The cabin crew/trainers when they do deliver training is for three (3) days maximum and they operate flights the next two (2) days. The ten (10) trainers have advised they will likely discontinue their training roles.

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## **APPENDIX: RELEVANT CLAUSE EXTRACTS**

### **NJS Enterprise Agreement 2023 - Clause 49.2 (Transfers)**

*"Cabin Crew transferring from one base to another at the direction of the Company shall be entitled to receive payment... for approved reasonable expenses incurred in relocating... [including] All personal effects... One car... Storage... Economy class airfares..."*

### **Heads of Agreement - Clause 2(f) (Eastern Protection)**

*"Whilst there are no express provisions in the Eastern EA around Company support to relocate... the Company's intent is that Impacted Cabin Crew employed by Eastern will be provided the same EA Entitlement support as the Impacted Cabin Crew employed by NJOS and NJS."*

### **Heads of Agreement - Clause 4(b) (Separation Payment)**

*"...the Impacted Cabin Crew member will be entitled to a lump sum payment of AUD \$20,000 (gross)..."*