



MEDIA RELEASE

THE RAAA WARNS OF THE COLLAPSE OF ESSENTIAL AVIATION SUPPORT SERVICES

14 September 2020

The Regional Aviation Association of Australia (RAAA) today expressed its concern that many aviation support services are now at risk of closing down due to the COVID19 pandemic. It highlighted that essential services such as flying schools, simulator training centres, maintenance and repair organisations and parts suppliers were suffering due to a loss of revenue that is becoming unsustainable for many of them.

Commenting on the problem RAAA Chairman, Jim Davis said that “the extension of the stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne and Victoria’s lengthy recovery roadmap has made the situation critical for Melbourne based suppliers who have little or no revenue but still must cover their fixed costs.” He added that “one consequence of the effective shutdown of flying schools and simulator centres in Melbourne is that many commercial pilots are unable to undergo the recurrency training and testing essential for maintaining their flying skills.”

Domestic border restrictions have meant that the problem is not confined to Melbourne based pilots but affects many interstate pilots who cannot access simulator training without undergoing quarantine upon their return. These border restrictions are also causing a loss of business to small charter operators which for reasons unexplained are subjected to stricter air crew quarantine requirements than the major domestic operators.

Aviation support services provide third party resources to General Aviation and small regional airlines and charter operators without which they cannot survive. Jim Davis commented that “to its credit the Commonwealth Government and the Deputy Prime Minister recognised very early on that regional airlines provide a vital link to small rural and remote communities and moved quickly to ensure their survival through direct and indirect subsidies to prevent their collapse.” He went on to say that “operators that rely on third party services for their maintenance, commercial pilot training and simulator and aircraft recurrency training need some reassurance that these organisations will survive the pandemic”.

The RAAA maintains that it is critical for aviation third party service providers to be preserved because once they are gone most will not be replaced as the barriers of entry into the industry are very high and the margins very low. These services will be desperately needed to rebuild the industry once the pandemic has passed.

The RAAA is calling upon:

- The Victorian Government to allow recurrency training for all professional pilots and to allow airline pilot cadet training to resume under a COVIDSafe program;
- Other State Governments to allow professional pilots to cross the Victorian border for training purposes under the same COVIDSafe rules as air crew operating domestic and regional air services; and
- The Commonwealth Government to implement a grant scheme for aviation support organisations along the same lines as the Regional Aviation Funding Assistance Program.

The RAAA also believes that a golden opportunity is being lost to expand the training of international pilots in Australia. As an example, the great majority of overseas trained Chinese pilots do so in the US but that is currently on hold. Given the low exposure to the coronavirus outside of Victoria and the fact that many schools in Australia already hold Chinese Government pilot training approvals now would be an ideal time to expand this export industry. The RAAA urges both Federal and State Governments to allow international pilot cadets back into the country, under an appropriate COVIDSafe program, as soon as possible.

The RAAA represents aviation across Australia. It has around 100 members and its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) holding members directly employ over 2,500 Australians, many in regional areas. On an annual basis, the RAAA's AOC members jointly turnover more than \$1.5b, carry well in excess of 2 million passengers and move over 23 million kilograms of freight.

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