

**Australian Human Rights Commission**  
**National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in the**  
**Workplace**

**Submission of the Flights Attendants' Association**  
**of Australia – International Division**



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## Introduction

1. The Flight Attendants' Association of Australia – International Division (FAAA) represents Australian based cabin crew working on long haul international flights. The FAAA makes the following submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in the Workplace on behalf of its members.
2. The FAAA is an affiliate of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and supports and adopts the ACTU's submission to the inquiry.
3. This brief submission will:
  - a. Highlight key issues of concern to cabin crew; and
  - b. Highlight key findings and responses from a survey conducted by the FAAA.

### **Key areas of concern for cabin crew**

4. For cabin crew, there are a number of issues which are unique to cabin crew.

### **Employer pro-active support for special arrangements**

5. The unique rostering arrangements of cabin crew and the unique characteristics of their workplaces mean that there sometimes needs to be very specific pro-active arrangements facilitated by employers to assist with employees being able to continue to perform their jobs after they have been sexually harassed. For example, a cabin crew member who has been sexually harassed by another cabin crew member or a pilot, may require the assistance of the employer to ensure that they are not rostered to work on a flight or trip on the person who engaged was the harasser.
6. Cabin crew work in constantly changing and unique workplaces where there may be a blurred line between work related activities and personal activities. For example, cabin crew working on international flights, will be required to have rest time in "slip ports" overseas, where their employer is responsible for them. However, they will be engaged in some personal activities such as getting dinner with colleagues or maybe going out for a drink with colleagues.
7. Another characteristic of cabin crew workplaces is that when they are on the plane, there is no escape until the flight lands and passengers are able to disembark. A response which highlights this issue is below:

*"They were from passengers on long flights and there was no escape. I felt that reporting them would result in a worse situation for me on board. I just wanted to get on with my work."*

8. It is important that there is cultivated a culture in workplaces that the employer should be under an obligation to take pro-active steps to support an employee to continue to perform their job without the risk of being sexually harassed again in the future.

#### **Providing outcomes to investigations or complaints to the complainant**

9. Cabin crew who have engaged in a process of making a complaint have expressed concerns to the FAAA where the result of their complaint or any investigation arising out of their complaint are not communicated by their employer to them. It is important once processes are commenced by an employee who has experienced sexual harassment, that they are communicated to about where their complaint is up to, or what was outcome of their complaint.

#### **Education programs**

10. There has been a lot of focus on complaint processes, punishment and addressing the behaviours of sexual harassers. Another focus that warrants attention is the development of personal skills and capacity of those who might experience sexual harassment to assert their right not to be sexually harassed.
11. A feature of the responses to the FAAA survey, which will be discussed further below, is that there appear to be two categories of responses that arise. There may be more than two categories. However, for the purpose of this issue of education, it is useful to identify these two. The first category is cabin crew who feel they are not able make a complaint and are not able to address the issue directly themselves. The second category is cabin crew who deal with the matter directly, on the spot themselves and feel confident that the issue is resolved and no longer requires their attention. The feelings of self-confidence and control over their situation expressed in responses from cabin crew in this second category are notable.
12. For the first category of cabin crew, it would be useful to explore what educational or cultural programs might be developed to build up the capacity and personal skills of employees to be able to directly confront and address sexual harassment at the initial point where it is beginning to occur. While this is not always appropriate or able to be a response option, particularly in aggressive or violent types of harassment, it may be an appropriate option in some circumstances.
13. The historical behavior of cabin crew and the historical way in which the community has viewed cabin crew has shaped many of the behavior amongst and towards cabin crew. Changes in community and workplace expectations is another factor in support of a focus on developing further education and programs designed to influence workplace cultures and build personal

capacity amongst employees in ways to deal with sexual harassment. In some workplaces where cabin crew have very extensive years of service, there would have been many changes to the expectations and workplace culture over their period of service as cabin crew.

### **The long term impact of sexual harassment**

14. The experience of the FAAA is that employers are not sufficiently prepared in terms of their systems, human resource capacity or general management capacity to be able to deal with serious instances of sexual harassment. In the same way that cabin crew are highly skilled professionals trained to prepare for serious incidents that are unlikely to occur, it would be useful for companies to prepare their systems and processes to be able to support employees who experience sexual harassment, particularly very serious incidents of sexual harassment.

### **The FAAA Survey**

15. The FAAA Survey was conducted in conjunction with its National Division. The responses received by the survey, are illustrative of the culture that currently exists within the workplaces of cabin crew.
16. 43% of respondents indicated that they had experience sexual harassment or bullying in the workplace. Of those, only 34% reported the incident.
17. 66% reported that they were not comfortable discussing the incident with their Manager. 76% responded that they did not feel supported by their employer.
18. 62% of respondents indicated that they did not report for fear of reprisal, reputation damage or peer pressure. Of those who did not report their incident, 77% of respondents indicated that they would have reported the incident if there was a special area for these types of complaints outside of their normal management.
19. Below are some extracts of Survey Responses which highlight the sentiments expressed by respondents. Where necessary, references to specific workplaces have been amended to de-identify the workplace, without changing the meaning of the response.
20. The following are a snapshot of responses to the question, "Why didn't you report the incident?"
21. *"They were from passengers on long flights and there was no escape. I felt that reporting them would result in a worse situation for me on board. I just wanted to get on with my work."*

22. *"Nothing is confidential, it would prob mean the male worker would be sacked, I was not prepared to speak up."*
23. *"Because I would have to work with the person again."*
24. *"Felt would not be supported by management."*
25. *"Fear of retaliation."*
26. *"Fear no one would take it seriously."*
27. *"It comes with the job."*
28. *"I'd prefer not to cause a scene and it could be difficult to face the person when I worked with them again."*
29. *"In many situations I feel I'm not heard. I feel the "boys will be boys" and "he's my buddy" mentality over rules any womens complaint. I would have preferred to speak to a woman who understands what its like, My manager seems professional but I realised afterwards he wasn't interested and had a lack of understanding. He didn't ask me how I felt about the situation or what was said or done to me. I have now had other situations Iv'e felt uncomfortable with but have not feel confident to speak to my manger and feel stuck with what to do. There is still a huge amount of sexism in the workplace and that doesn't stop at in my workplace."*
30. *"Its more of a cultural issue amongst crew and is deemed as acceptable. The fear of it not be taken seriously."*
31. *"I had only just started my new career and did not want to cause any trouble so early into my career."*
32. *"I doubted myself that I may have been over reacting with sexual harassment and if it constituted has sexual harassment. I just hoped I didn't fly with them again Same goes with bullying. Just hoped I didn't fly with them again. I didn't want to go through the process and having my name out there and questioned and doubted by others. Too stressful."*
33. *"I approached the offender and sorted it out."*
34. *"I'm strong enough to handle it myself and I did."*

35. *"I made it clear that the behaviour shown was inappropriate and unwarranted. The offender apologised and it did not happen again. Have been verbally harassed by passengers in the past - I removed myself from the situation knowing I was unlikely to see the passengers ever again."*
36. *"I did not consider them to be serious incidences and was confident in managing the situation by addressing those responsible and stating their behaviour was unacceptable. Apologies made and accepted. Details - sexual harassment, male flight attendant made inappropriate comments. Apologised when pulled up for it."*
37. *"The little touches and comments no. Other more serious offences were reported on my behalf."*

### **Conclusion**

38. The FAAA supports the recommendations proposed by the ACTU in their submission. We also urge the Commission to consider the issues raised above.

**End**