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HD **Qantas safety shock**
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Union dossier - Engines found 'not secured' after offshore maintenance

Qantas aircraft sent for maintenance in Asia have been found with corrosion on the wings, multiple cracks, faulty engine indicators and, in the case of a 747 jumbo, three of four engines not held on properly, the aircraft engineers' union has alleged in a dossier detailing a litany of errors.

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The extraordinary attack on maintenance practices in Asia over the years, and against Qantas' decision to have work carried out there, was made during a Senate inquiry into the airline's future two weeks after it confirmed that it will axe 5000 jobs as part of a \$2 **billion** cost-cutting program.

In a bid to stop the government from relaxing the Qantas **Sale** Act, the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association's federal secretary, Steve Purvinas, has used parliamentary privilege to release the dossier detailing errors on Qantas planes following heavy maintenance in Singapore, **Hong Kong** and Kuala Lumpur.

But Qantas boss Alan Joyce told the Senate inquiry that every plane which had maintenance performed on it was certified not only by local regulators but Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

Mr Joyce said any mistakes were fixed when found, and the level of errors at offshore maintenance bases was no greater than those made here. Qantas made clear that many levels of inspections pick up errors during maintenance.

Mr Purvinas' claims come after a week in which the spotlight has been thrown on the competency of aviation officials in Malaysia following the disappearance of a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet with 239 people on board.

Mr Purvinas, who remarked that he would "slow bake" the airline in the **lead**-up to its controversial grounding in 2011, released the submission that claimed no fewer than 600 defects on the first Qantas 737 to have work conducted on it in Singapore in late 2009. The alleged defects included several cases of corrosion on the wings, a cracked floorbeam, damaged wiring and numerous wiring clamps loose or damaged.

The defects were found by Qantas engineers sent to Singapore to look over the plane after locals had carried out their own inspections, the union says.

Mr Purvinas said the Australian travelling public was put at risk by Qantas management's decision to offshore more work - a claim rejected by the airline. Qantas accused the union of again playing the "safety card" by compiling a list of maintenance issues dating back 16 years.

He has also alleged in his submission to the Senate inquiry that a Qantas 747 jumbo that had heavy maintenance in **Hong Kong** in 2008 was later found to have three of its four engines "not held on properly".

"If any one of these engines had fallen off during flight, a most likely outcome would have been the loss of the aircraft," he said in the submission.

The union has also claimed that at least 95 errors were found on a Qantas 737 which in 2008 had heavy maintenance in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. These included "extensive corrosion on the fuselage, doors and wings" and rusty flight control cables.

Coalition senators accused Mr Purvinas of dog-whistle politics, and pointed out that some of the best cars in the world were built in Asia.

Mr Purvinas also claimed Australia's air-safety regulator was "another arm of Qantas' industrial relations department", a remark later dismissed by Mr Joyce as "absolute nonsense". Mr Joyce said CASA was "not captured by any airline", and Qantas' safety record was as strong as it had ever been.

The union official has a history of mounting extraordinary attacks on Qantas. In 2007, he claimed that inmates from Singapore's Changi prison were used to clean Qantas planes in the city state - allegations that were described as "outrageous" by the airline.

Other unions also stepped up their attacks at the Senate inquiry on Friday on moves by the Abbott government to repeal a key section of the Qantas **Sale** Act that caps foreign ownership at 49 per cent and requires the airline to base the majority of its maintenance **operations** in Australia.

Australian Services Union assistant national secretary Linda White said the Qantas **Sale** Act had been a significant barrier to the airline sending jobs overseas and, if removed, would create a "superhighway out of the country".

Ms White said the most likely to go overseas would be call-centre jobs or those which did not involve any reaction with passengers. "Everything is on the table," she said.

A spokeswoman for Transport Minister Warren Truss said the air-safety watchdog had been in discussions with Qantas to ensure any new arrangements did not have an impact on safety.

Transport Workers Union national secretary Tony Sheldon said Qantas still couldn't say where the axe would fall.

CO alcaeg : Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association | qntas : Qantas Airways Ltd

IN i75 : Airlines | i7501 : Scheduled Passenger Airlines | iairtr : Air Transport | itsp : Transportation/Shipping

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