



Virgin Australia Airlines Pty Ltd
PO Box 1034
Spring Hill QLD
Australia 4004
T +61 7 3295 3000
virginaustralia.com

18 December 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretariat,

Submission: Inquiry into the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equity Targets) Bill 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Inquiry into the *Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equity Targets) Bill 2024* to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee.

Virgin Australia believes that a gender balanced workforce benefits everyone, and we are committed to the *Workplace Gender Equality Act*. Gender Equity is one of the pillars which underpin our approach to diversity and inclusion, which we call our "Belonging" Strategy. Pay equity is an important component of gender equity and remuneration at Virgin Australia which is determined independently of gender or any other personal characteristic. We are committed to ensuring everyone is equally valued and rewarded for the role they do.

It is clear that the aviation sector in both Australia and other countries has a gender imbalance in key roles such as pilots and engineering. Virgin Australia's gender pay gap is driven by the demographic profile of our organisation, which sees a larger proportion of men occupying higher paying pilot and aircraft engineering roles. This type of gender pay gap is not unique to Virgin Australia. Airline operators in Australia, and also in the United Kingdom, reported comparable median gender pay gaps for the latest reporting period. Virgin Australia has gender representation targets and supporting initiatives across our frontline and corporate workgroups and we are focused on improving the demographic profile of key roles across our organisation over time. This is not an issue that can be resolved in the short term.

Belonging Strategy

Diversity and inclusion is at the heart of Virgin Australia. In 2022, we relaunched our diversity and inclusion strategy, Belonging. We have an employee-led network with an ongoing focus on Gender Equity. With the support of this group, we became the first commercial airline sponsor of Women in Aviation/Aerospace Australia and committed to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) '25by2025' initiative, which will see the airline aim to increase the number of women in senior positions and under-represented areas by 25 per cent, or up to a minimum of 25 per cent by 2025. We have also undertaken a range of initiatives such as updating our parental leave policy and reviewed our rostering to ensure greater flexibility in our working arrangements. We also launched an unconscious bias program for our leaders and have made changes to our recruitment approach to prevent unconscious bias.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Reporting

We continue to participate in the annual gender reporting process commissioned by WGEA to promote and improve greater gender equality in our workplace. We support this work and the light that it sheds on this important issue.

We have a diverse workforce, with 77 per cent of our people employed under an Enterprise Agreement. Each frontline workgroup has its own EA with prescribed pay rates by role type and seniority level. This ensures that all our team members are paid equally for doing the same role.



Virgin Australia Airlines Pty Ltd
PO Box 1034
Spring Hill QLD
Australia 4004
T +61 7 3295 3000
virginaustralia.com

In reviewing the proposed amendments, Virgin Australia would like to bring the following issues to the attention of the Committee:

- Flexibility is critical for the aviation sector to enable targets to be set which are appropriate for the business and demographic profile.
- Aviation has some industry specific issues to consider, for example, long term trends around work types which are specifically male dominated (pilots, engineering and pit crew) and female dominated (cabin crew and guest services).
- Within the Australian context, Virgin Australia is a value carrier and thus different to other aviation businesses. Thus, business specific, rather than general industry targets should be considered.
- Recognition that long-term targets are required as the timeframe for training and developing roles currently dominated by men are in excess of 10 years.

Planning for the future

In November 2024, Virgin Australia wrote to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government the Hon Catherine King MP detailing the significant difficulties in attracting and retaining talent and the problems associated with enticing the next generation of aviation workers to pursue a career in the sector. This is also detailed extensively in Virgin Australia's Aviation Green Paper submission.

This is why Virgin Australia has recently undertaken the most comprehensive workforce planning in the airline's history, which has resulted in the development of a new long-term workforce planning strategy. Our workforce planning and strategy has identified gaps and opportunities for our current and future workforce needs and has utilised demographic modelling to assist us in meaningfully planning future recruitment and training drives. While acknowledging the challenges in attracting and retaining talent, Virgin Australia is committed to encouraging young people to pursue a career in the aviation sector. Virgin Australia is engaged with the Aviation High School in Clayfield, hosts work experience students in Perth, supports aviation industry careers events, and our flight crews regularly participate in school visits and career advice sessions to drive interest in aviation as a vocation.

Notwithstanding these initiatives, Virgin Australia recognises the urgent need for ongoing and increased investment to boost participation in aviation apprenticeship programs through collaboration with state and federal authorities including Jobs and Skills Australia and educational institutions, to develop programs and pathways that promote aviation-related careers from an early school age. To this end, Virgin Australia is also investigating the re-establishment of its own cadet program, as was in operation prior to administration as a pathway of attracting and training our future talent.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. We look forward to your feedback and are eager to continue collaborating on solutions.

Yours Sincerely,

Jane Ireland
General Manager, Organisation Development