

...government decisions on these particular matters and I think that the best thing I can do, at this moment, is to read out a statement to you, which also gives some other information which I am sure that you and other Australians will be very much interested in. I will now read the statement:

At a meeting in Adelaide today the Cabinet considered the strike by air traffic controllers. Cabinet reaffirmed its view that this matter ought to be settled by the proper processes of arbitration.

The claim has, on many occasions, been before the appropriate bodies. The full bench of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission is waiting to hear the matter now. The only requirement before that happens is for air traffic controllers to resume work.

The harm and suffering imposed on tens of thousands of people in Australia, and overseas, can then be avoided. It is not only people inconvenienced by the strike, it is obviously people who have been stood down as a consequence of the strike.

The Government noted that a number of initiatives have been taken by unions within the air transport industry which would permit certain domestic and international passenger flights to be operated. It is noted that the Pilots Federation has announced that their members are prepared to maintain the existing evening services to and from Tasmania, continue existing services in the Pilbarra and reinstate the service between Sydney and Norfolk Island. The Government feels that these initiatives demonstrate a sense of national responsibility and would particularly commend the domestic branch of the Federation of Air Pilots whose members are currently subject to stand down orders, and have therefore decided that they are not prepared to accept payment for operating these services.

The Government is also pleased to note that air traffic controllers have agreed to provide operational services which will allow four international flights out of and into Australia to assist passengers stranded in Australia and overseas. The Government hopes that the controllers will agree to additional flights as soon as possible. Mr Nixon will be able to give more details, but the four flights would in no way meet the requirements of passengers held up either in Australia or overseas waiting to get back to Australia.

The Government has indicated on a number of occasions its support for the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission and the role of the Public Service Board. Cabinet now reaffirms that view.

The Government notes that there will be a vote by air traffic controllers on Friday on whether to resume work and thus allow the full bench to determine their claim on its merits.

In the name of the Government I ask all air traffic controllers to examine in their own minds the proper course of action that they should take. I would ask them to consider what is in their own best interests and what is the in best interests of the nation.

In the Government's view if these two questions are examined with an open mind, the air traffic controllers would conclude that they should return to work, and thus would vote accordingly on Friday. Therefore I ask them to put Australia first. Above all, I ask them to accept the verdict of the impartial body.

Over many years Australia has built a complex and highly competent system of arbitration to adjudicate when there is a dispute. The arbitration system has been developed to protect the weak, and to ensure fairness. It is time and it is necessary that air traffic controllers indicate their willingness to accept the decision of the umpire, which in this case is the highest arbitral authority, the full bench of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission

The Government appeals, therefore, for this last time to air traffic controllers to exercise a sense of national responsibility.

Cabinet has spent a long time considering all facets of this matter. It has made the decision that if the vote on Friday is to continue the strike, Parliament will be reassembled on Monday and asked to pass special legislation.

It is decided to announce this decision immediately. It would be unfair if air traffic controllers were to vote on this issue without knowing the action that the Government proposes to take.

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