



BRIEFINGS //

QANTAS Pilot Council

TO // Qantas Short Haul and Long Haul Pilots
FROM // AFAP Qantas Pilot Council
DATE // 26 November 2025
RE // QPC Briefing No 32 2025

A friendly reminder, if you are not yet a member but would like to receive our briefs, please email: membership@afap.org.au with the subject line "Please add me to the QPC mailing list".

QPC Briefing No 32 2025 Carer's Lines, Blank-Line Sharing and Roster Sustainability

Context

Over recent years, significant changes in the LHEA's rostering rules have altered how blank-lines and carer's lines are distributed and utilised among pilots. These changes have had tangible consequences for roster stability across fleets and categories, and the issue is now evolving from a purely enterprise agreement negotiation matter into a legitimate operational management issue.

A key driver of this shift is the unintended expansion of the carer's-line category. Broad eligibility criteria under the EA, coupled with increased uptake from pilots, have significantly altered the balance of blank-line coverage. A large part of this is driven by pilots in normal "two-working-parent" or shared-parenting situations seeking roster advantages. As a result, the burden of blank-lines is falling on a shrinking portion of the pilot group.

The application of carer's lines is no longer limited to the small number of genuinely exceptional cases; it is increasingly common, and this scale means that operational sustainability and fairness across the workforce are now at risk. Reform is no longer optional, it must be treated as an operational imperative.

It is important to clarify that applying for a carer's line does not place the obligation or cost of accommodation onto the Company. The Company does not create additional resourcing or roster capacity to support carer's lines. Instead, the burden is carried by the rest of the pilot group.

Every carer's line allocated removes a pilot from the pool of those who share blank-lines and irregular flying, and that load is redistributed to the remaining pilots, many of whom are managing two working parents, shared parenting, illness in family, ageing relatives, or other substantial commitments. When a pilot accesses the carers provision for circumstances that fall outside the statutory definition (see below), they are not asking the Company for help; they are asking their peers to absorb additional instability.

This brief outlines:

- How lines are structured
- The history and purpose of the carer's line provision
- The effect of shared blank-lines and PSN (rotating seniority)
- Current pressures and risks to roster stability
- Possible reform pathways for future discussion

This is **not a value judgement** on individual pilots. Many pilots applying for carer's lines do so in good faith. The issue is systemic and has arisen from the way the rules have evolved and been applied.

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Understanding Line Types

For new pilots or those unfamiliar with different line types:

Line Type	Description
Pattern Line	A normal roster containing scheduled flying. Short and Low lines are forms of pattern lines short of divisor with Assignable Time Available (ATA) and pay protection.
Blank Line	A roster containing no planned flying. The pilot remains available to be assigned work. Historically shared among a portion of the category, currently shared by all in category excluding Carers and Supervisory pilots.
Carer's Line	A special category allocated to pilots with approved circumstances requiring designated days off and exemption from blank-lines. Access to highest open-time priority when under-projected.

Original Purpose of Carer's Lines

Carer's lines were introduced to protect pilots facing significant and specific caring responsibilities from:

- The uncertainty of blank-lines
- Loss of predictable days off
- Rosters incompatible with critical family obligations

This mechanism worked effectively when:

- The definition of "carer" was applied narrowly, and
- Blank-lines were shared by only a small proportion (typically the lower 20–30%) of each category.

Under that structure and before rotating seniority (PSN), pilots could also use seniority, by remaining in category and forgoing early promotion, to stabilise rosters and maintain predictable family arrangements. This, in many cases, would prevent pilots from ever needing a carers line.

What Has Changed

Two major structural changes have shifted behaviour and outcomes:

1. Shared Blank-Line Model

Blank-lines are now shared across the entire category, rather than concentrated among the most junior.

Consequence: Remaining in category no longer protects against blank-lines through seniority.

2. PSN (Rotating Seniority)

Rotating seniority reduces the practical impact of long-held seniority on bidding outcomes.

Consequence: Pilots can no longer reliably "trade seniority" for roster stability.

In combination, these changes reduced the ability for pilots to manage family circumstances through seniority, which in turn increased the incentive to apply for carer's lines. The lack of a statutory or clearly defined threshold for eligibility further widened this effect.



Resulting Pressure on Roster System

- The number of pilots holding carer’s lines has increased steadily and significantly.
- The remaining blank-lines are being absorbed by a shrinking pool of “non-carer” pilots.
- This has resulted in a concentration of roster instability onto a smaller and smaller group of pilots.

We are now approaching a point where:

- The number of blank-lines may reach critical-mass relative to the number of non-carer pilots available to absorb them.
- This would lead to a rotating pattern where all non-carer pilots alternate between a blank-line roster and a pattern-line roster, regardless of preference or seniority.
- This would encourage the remaining “non-carer” pilots to look for ways they could qualify as carers to secure a sustainable working-life.
- Such an outcome is completely unsustainable and inconsistent with the principles of fairness, predictability and shared operational responsibility.

Additional Factors

Pilots will note that in the LHEA, RM19.3 states:

Maximum training to achieve correct establishment

The Company states it will provide maximum training to drive numbers to correct establishment, based on the relevant planning divisor. Blank line coverage of 15 percent (additional to 11.5 percent for annual leave) will be used for planning purposes. This figure will be fine-tuned by the Company as experience dictates.

In some categories, the number of blank-line holders has approached nearly double the coverage level contemplated under RM19.3, often exceeding 20% in a single bid period. This reflects shortcomings in establishment and resource planning.

Despite the issue being repeatedly raised, training throughput has not aligned with the foreseeable movement of crew between fleets. This suggests the Company may not have fully met its RM19.3 obligations to maintain establishment appropriately. While some disruption was inevitably linked to post-COVID fleet reactivation and maintenance cycles, we are now four years beyond stand-up, and these issues can no longer be attributed solely to pandemic recovery dynamics.

Possible Reform Directions

No decisions have been made. However, the following options have been raised by members for further discussion on council:

Reform Idea	Summary
Implement statutory definition of “carer”	Align eligibility to an objective threshold consistent with national standards.
Adjust bidding rights for carer’s-line holders	Carer’s lines provide protection from blank-lines and designated days off, but bidding preferences would be limited.





EA11 Flexi-Line Model	The month-on / month-off model provides predictable coverage for households where both parents work or both parents fly, without relying on carer's line provisions.
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Definitions of "carer" for inclusion

It is important for Pilots to understand the statutory definitions of carers and factor this into the ongoing discussion.

Under [s.65 of the Fair Work Act \(Cth\) 2009](#), the following the circumstances in which an employee can request a flexible working arrangement (FWA):

- the employee is pregnant;
- the employee is the parent, or has responsibility for the care, of a child who is of school age or younger;
- the employee is a carer (within the meaning of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*);
- the employee has a disability;
- the employee is 55 or older;
- the employee is experiencing family and domestic violence;
- the employee provides care or support to a member of the employee's immediate family, or a member of the employee's household, who requires care or support because the member is experiencing family and domestic violence.

Under the [Carer Recognition Act 2010](#), a "carer" is someone who gives care and support to a relative or friend who:

- has a disability;
- has a medical condition (terminal or chronic illness);
- has a mental illness; or
- is frail because of old age.

Additionally, the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* states:

To avoid doubt, a person is not a carer of another person ... merely because the person:

- (a) is the spouse, de facto partner, parent, child or other relative of an individual, or is the guardian of an individual; or
- (b) lives with an individual who requires care.

It is important to note that because one of the circumstances applies to an employee does not mean they automatically have access to an FWA. An employer may refuse a request for an FWA on reasonable business grounds. The Act sets out a variety of factors that must be considered by an employer including that there is no capacity or it would be impractical to change the working arrangements of other employees to accommodate the FWA.

The above can be contrasted with the more expansive definition of 'responsibilities as a carer' and 'carer' in RM74.3 of the EA:

Pursuant to Chapter 15:

RM74.3.1 a reference to a pilot's 'responsibilities as a carer' is a reference to the pilot's responsibilities to be a primary caregiver to an immediate family or household member; and



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RM74.3.2 a reference to a 'carer' is a reference to a pilot who meets the criteria of a person who has responsibilities to care for or support an immediate family or household member.

Key Point

The issue is not whether individual pilots deserve support. The issue is that the current system distributes the cost of that support unevenly and is now reaching structural limits.

This issue will not resolve itself. The carer's line system can only remain fair, sustainable, and available for those who genuinely need it if the Company commits to reforming the eligibility criteria and aligning establishment and training planning with operational requirements. While the AFAP will continue to raise this issue formally, meaningful change will occur faster and more decisively when pilots themselves also make their concerns known directly to management.

If you feel the current situation is unsustainable, if you believe the burden of blank-lines and roster instability is being unevenly carried, or if you support ensuring that genuine carers can continue to be protected, make your voice heard. Contact your Base Manager or Doug Alley (you can also cc in gpc@scheduling@afap.org.au). Be clear, respectful, and professional. The Company must understand that this is not a marginal issue affecting a handful of pilots; it is affecting the stability and equity of rosters across the operation.

For those pilots who do not wish to directly engage with their manager / Qantas about the issue, we will be conducting a survey early in 2026 which will further direct our advocacy.

The AFAP will continue to advocate on your behalf, but collective pressure is what compels action. If you value roster predictability, fairness in workload distribution, and a carer's system that protects those who truly need it, now is the time to speak.

Questions and Feedback

If you have any questions or feedback please contact your AFAP Qantas Pilot Council representatives at gpc@afap.org.au, or the AFAP legal and industrial team of Senior Legal/ Industrial Officer Pat Larkins (patrick@afap.org.au), Senior Industrial Officer Deanna Cain (deanna@afap.org.au) or Executive Director Simon Lutton (simon@afap.org.au).

Regards,

AFAP Qantas Pilot Council

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