

Qantas tells 120 pilots they can go fly for Emirates

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In a move that will baffle many Australians, Qantas has told its pilots that it will give first officers three years leave without pay to go and fly for its fastest growing long haul competitor, Emirates.

The notice, circulated by Qantas this afternoon, says Emirates has approached its Flight Operations division "requesting assistance in the supply of crew...but at this stage only for applicants prepared to fly as first officers."

Qantas even says it will facilitate annual leave for pilots that wish to travel to Dubai to attend interviews or participate further in the Emirates selection process. The number of first officer positions that Emirates is prepared to offer successful Qantas applicants is said to be 120.

However Emirates is more broadly believed to be seeking up to 700 qualified foreign pilots by the end of next year, and has been a regular recruiter of talent in Australia.

Qantas is bound by provisions in its current pilot agreements that allow pilots leave without pay to fly for a defined term for other carriers. In general, it means that at the end of such leave, pilots can return to Qantas, but not necessarily to the positions or type of

airliner that they were flying at the stage of their careers when they exercised their right to unpaid leave.

The sore point for many Qantas pilots is the likelihood that such leave without pay transfers to other carriers often result in Australian pilots never returning to their previous careers, and can be seen as reducing the redundancy costs from the pilot job cuts that are widely anticipated when Qantas announces a restructuring of its full service international operations on August 24.

Qantas CEO Alan Joyce has already declared Qantas international to be an insupportable burden on its balance sheets, and foreshadowed further moves to transfer Qantas jobs and assets to overseas controlled entities based perhaps in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or Shanghai, as well as other measures yet to be revealed.

However facilitating the transfer of the pilot asset to such a major Qantas competitor as Emirates, rather than its own off shore entities, is this evening seen by some pilots as inflammatory, and part of what is seen to be a *sell out and quit* mentality by a board determined to kill all but a token part of the full service Qantas in favor of expanding its Jetstar low cost carrier franchises.

This position has been bolstered by a policy of claiming losses by the full service Qantas, yet making it pay for much of the support and fleet costs of Jetstar, a lack of transparency that leaves investors and the public uniformed about the relative performance of the so called low cost and full service parts of the Qantas business.

Joyce has signalled that after August 24 Qantas international, as it is now known and operated as an Australian airline, will be very different and much smaller.

There is, already, a smell of blood in the air.

<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/planetalking/2011/07/08/qantas-tells-120-pilots-they-can-go-fly-for-emirates/>