

**“In the event
of an emergency
go flight free”**

**Why choosing to not fly
is a climate emergency response**

7.30pm Tuesday 18 February 2020

The Assembly Hall, Boyd Community Hub, 207 City Road, Southbank, VIC 3006

Welcome.

And thanks for coming today. I’m Kim Windsor and with me are the Flight Free Australia crew: Alex Mungall and Mark Carter, and coming in on video later, Annabel Smith and Helen Hutchison.

Flight Free Australia acknowledges that we meet today on the land of the Wurundjeri people, land never ceded. We pay respect to their Elders, past and present, and acknowledge the pivotal role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play within the Australian community.

Okay. You know how when after you’ve got on a plane and it’s taxiing to the runway, how the flight attendants run through what to do in the case of an emergency? Well this session will be a bit like that. Mark will run through why aviation is a climate emergency issue, why it’s so difficult to stop flying, and how that can change. Then, before we open the floor to some Q&A from you guys, we’ll hear some personal stories of changed travel plans from the Flight Free Australia crew.

Thanks Kim. And thanks to you all for coming.

Our plan for tonight is to talk about flying from three angles. First, why aviation is a climate emergency issue. Second, why we keep flying. And thirdly how that can change ... via policy, via community action and for individuals.

Why is flying a climate emergency issue?

To understand, let’s first stand back from the flying issue for a moment, and spend a minute on the nub of the climate issue. What is an honest description of our climate predicament? What amount of emissions reduction are required to prevent catastrophe?



You've probably heard of the IPCC report claiming we can stay below 1.5 degrees of warming by halving emissions in 10 years. That's decarbonising the total economy by 5 to 10% every year for ten years.

But halving emissions in 10 years is actually just as likely to not keep warming below 1.5 degrees. For the IPCC it's a 50:50 proposition.

But a 50:50 probability is not a full risk assessment. The IPCC projection is based on probabilities. As in what is most likely to happen. It doesn't take into account possibilities. As in how bad could things get. Civilisation ending consequences of the warming from ongoing emissions are possible. For example it's possible they could trigger uncontrollable emissions from melting arctic permafrost. That consequence may be of low probability but as a possibility with extremely high impact – how higher could you go than global social collapse? – that consequence should be included in a risk assessment of any emissions reduction schedule. So halving in 10 is not a safe way to go at all.

Looking at the scheduling issue another way... if just the current level of atmospheric CO2 was maintained – as in, emissions stopped today – the planet would likely warm around 3°C. At that temperature, 3 to 4 million years ago, sea levels were around 25 metres higher. 25 metres!

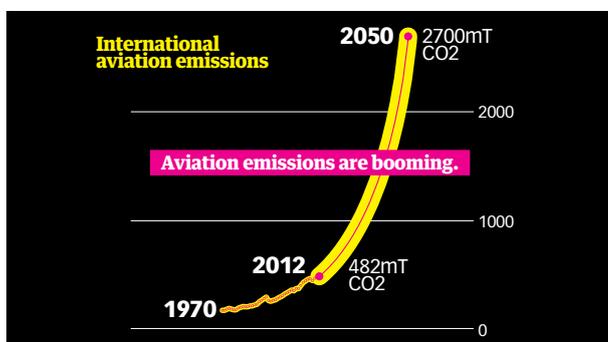
So, we obviously need to get emissions to zero and draw back down our existing emissions – the ones likely to get us to 3 degrees – as fast as humanly possible.

A monumental challenge. And otherwise known as a climate emergency response.

This then, is the context for our discussion of aviation emissions.

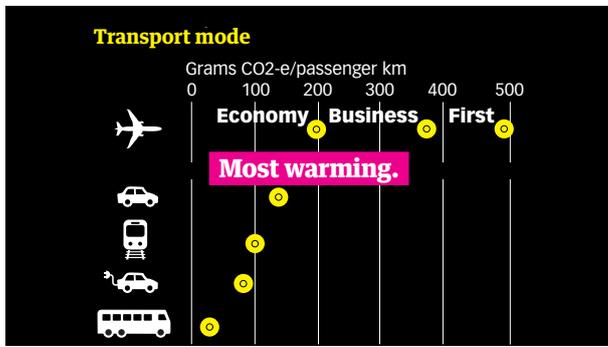
Tell the truth. Don't go with just, "what's possible". Demand what's necessary and work to make that possible.

Where does aviation fit into a climate emergency response? How can aviation emissions be reduced to zero in 10 years?



Because right now emissions from flying are booming.

Increasing by 5% each year. To a predicted 22% – nearly a quarter – of all global carbon emissions by 2050.



Flying is the most warming form of transport per kilometre travelled and the most warming single thing you can do. A London return flight increases an average Australian's contribution to warming by 50%.



And right now there are around 3700 airports on the planet. From which around 23,000 planes, make 30 million flights a year.

Now, let's hear from Annabel in Brisbane, why fighting aviation emissions is important.

So why do we keep flying?

Shouldn't we be on the path to phasing out our reliance on flying? What is stopping us?

Well, the aviation industry, government and the media are all acting as spoilers.

First, the aviation industry misleads us.

- It massively understates its contribution to global warming. It wants us to believe its 2% global CO2 emissions contribution means it's only responsible for 2% of global warming.



But at altitude its global warming effect is likely around 5 times that from its CO2 alone.

- It claims to be reducing its emissions, while actually increasing them.

Qantas to slash carbon emissions to zero by 2050

As travellers become more wary of the environmental impact of flying, Qantas has come up with the industry's "most ambitious" plan to counter it.

news NOVEMBER 11, 2019 10:25AM



If you read their media release from last November – “Qantas Group to slash carbon emissions” – you could reasonably expect Qantas were about to slash their carbon emissions. But they’re not. Like Scotty from Marketing, aviation uses accounting tricks to avoid its emissions reduction responsibilities. In a world too hot, all sectors must reduce their emissions as quickly as possible. But aviation cheats by claiming for itself, the reductions of other sectors. Hey! We’re going “carbon neutral”. Hey,

we’re getting to “net zero” emissions. It’s called offsetting, and, no matter how highly priced or well audited, offsets don’t actually reduce aviation emissions.

- The aviation industry also tells us it’s developing “sustainable fuels” – hoping we’ll take this to mean they’re developing zero carbon fuels, and that it’s therefore ok to keep flying now. Crucially however the industry’s announcements of “sustainable” breakthroughs are delivered free of context. They never report the proportion of the total reductions needed in the next 10 crucial years, that these breakthroughs will deliver. Because they are nowhere near enough. They hope reductions that may be delivered down the track, and way too late, are seen as an effective contribution now.

In reality the use of emissions-free fuel, by these 23,000 planes, within the next ten critical years, is just not gonna happen. Electric planes for short-haul flights may be possible in a few years. But international flights, powered by batteries are many decades away. The aviation industry seeks to fool us that by shuffling deckchairs it’ll avoid the iceberg.

We also keep flying because it’s embedded in our economy. Over 42 million international passengers flew to and from Australia in 2018.



The Sydney-Melbourne flight path carries the second highest number of passengers in the world – just under 10 million in 2017.

Australia’s international student industry, entirely dependent on flying, is our third biggest export revenue earner.

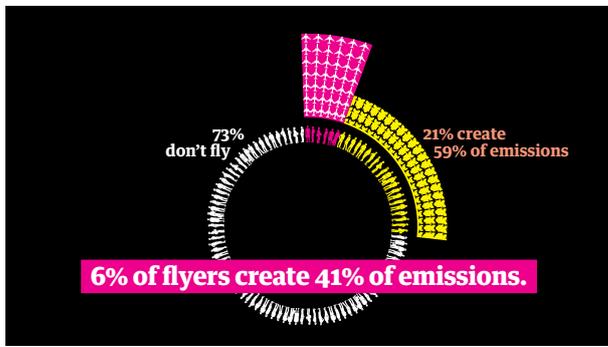
And we keep flying because it’s so cheap, thanks to government fuel subsidies. International

aviation fuel is not taxed – amounting to an annual 60 billion euro fuel tax evasion or fossil fuel subsidy – and domestic aviation fuel taxes are one tenth those for other transport.

We also keep flying because our governments are failing to support rail travel as an alternative.

As individuals why do we keep flying?

First up, it’s important to remember, that only a small minority of people on the planet have ever flown.



and, in Australia, just 6% of us create 41% of aviation emissions.

Those of us in this minority, keep flying because it enables so much. We have holidays to take, family to visit, work to be done in the global economy. In our normal life, it's difficult to give up flying.

We also keep flying when we don't know how much harm it causes. When we haven't been told.

But even when we're concerned about flying's hazards, it's tempting to rationalise ways to keep flying.

Some might say "But I'm offsetting!" When offsets don't reduce aviation emissions. Or

"But policy action is more important than personal action." When both are actually necessary to get us to safety. Or

"But I reduce my other emissions." Or

"I'll fly just a bit less." When an honest risk assessment says that's not enough.

So how can we get aviation emissions to zero?

Awareness of the heating hazards of flying, by governments and institutions, has taken off around the world in the last 2 years. It's

encouraging to see changes are underway Europe. To fiscal policy – with fuel taxes and air miles levies under consideration. To transport policy – with bans on short haul flights being considered and with the rehabilitation of train services.

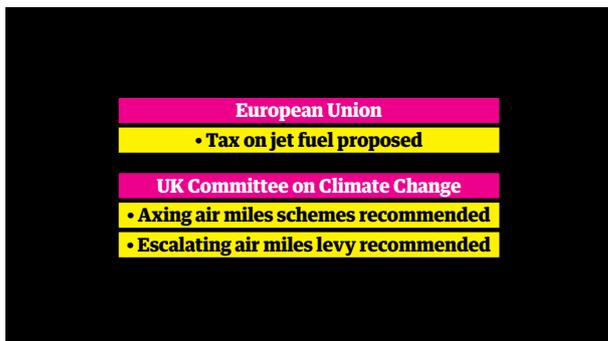
But these changes are only being considered because of the pressure applied by civil society groups campaigning on the wide range of aviation hazard issues.

And their pressure is having an effect.

New airports and runways are being halted around the world.

Just last week in the UK, expansion of Bristol airport was halted. And the CEO of British Airways, conceded late last year, that a third runway at Heathrow was unlikely due to environmental concerns.

150 aviation opposition groups, NGOs, and trade unions around the world make up the vibrant Stay Grounded network, based in Europe.





Their recent Degrowth of aviation report, discusses proposals to ban aviation advertising, to introduce frequent flyer levies, and to withdraw aviation subsidies.

In Europe the group, A free ride, has put the case for banning private jets, whose emissions are unregulated.

In Norway the University of Bergen’s Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation has developed a Low-carbon travel policy for academic institutions.

Climate charity Possible, has launched Climate Perks, a scheme to encourage companies to give employees extra paid leave when they take non-flying holidays.

These groups, pressuring government and industry, are empowered by the growing collective voice of individuals who’ve recognised the dangers of flying.



In Sweden the Flight Free pledge campaign was started in 2018 by Maja Rosen. It, and the general flight shame response of Swedes, contributed to the 9% drop in domestic airline passenger numbers in 2018.

Last October, Swiss bank UBS, surveyed more than 6,000 people from the UK, US, Germany and France about their flying habits, and found more than 20 per cent said they had intentionally reduced the number of flights they took over the last year. UBS estimated this trend could halve the expected 4 to 5 percent annual growth in air travel passengers.

The Flight Free campaign now has over 23,000 pledgers who won’t fly for a year. And has now spread to the UK, the US, Canada, Peru, France, Slovenia, Germany, Denmark, and Australia.

That’s us. We launched Flight Free in Australia last October with our pledge – an undertaking to not fly for 12 months.



Our starting point is an acknowledgement of the climate emergency and our first up goal is to raise awareness of what we’re discussing today.

Let's switch now and hear from Helen, our air steward in Tassy, on her flight free journey.

As Helen says, we see choosing to not fly as part of the climate emergency response now necessary across the planet.

And we support both personal action and policy action.

Even if you can't do the 12 month pledge right now, aviation emissions can be reduced in other ways. We may be facing more obstacles than those in Europe, but we can still build support for efficient interstate rail infrastructure. We can support communities protesting airport expansions in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. We can develop travel policy reforms with institutions, businesses and local governments. There's a lot to be done.

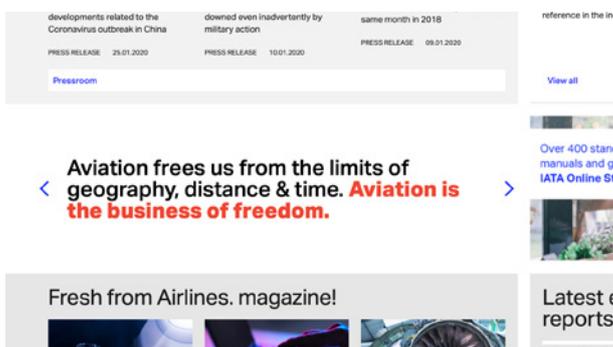
But here's the thing. It starts with us as individuals. Working through our responses has a huge upside. That's because, with no tech solution possible in the time available, we have to talk about behaviour change.

Behaviour change asks us to reassess what we value, our way in the world, our worldview. It asks us to reassess our priorities. Like when a raging bushfire is on the ridge. We forget the TV show we're watching. We change our priorities. We choose to put our most precious things in the car and leave home. Possibly for ever. Things we'd otherwise, not do.



This frame of mind – changing priorities from life as normal to life saving – is exactly the same frame of mind required for the climate emergency response.

Okay. So now, before finishing, I'd like to talk more personally for a moment...



The other day I bumped into an interesting description of flying on the International Air Transport Association website. It said proudly "Aviation frees us from the limits of geography, distance and time." Now you may think this is pretty out there, but it made me wonder how much that illusion – that we think we can exist outside physical realities – numbs our ears to the alarm bells now ringing.

I've always, for some reason or other, and probably like a lot of you, been concerned about not stuffing up the living world.

*So some time ago, I switched on to the greenhouse gas problem. As I read up on it I found myself drawn to the part flying played. Of course I couldn't actually talk about the hazards of flying. It killed the conversation, or, worse, it was easier to judge and excommunicate some of my very frequent flyer friends! How about that? Then, I researched and wrote *The elephant in the sky*. Which led to presenting a session at last years Festival. Then later last year I met up with the *Flight Free* crew.*

Okay, so here's what I really want to say.

My priorities really changed, when someone pointed out, that from where we now stand, come what may, our future is one of radical change. Either as chaos and calamity, as the climate makes life unsafe, or, as a never-seen-before emergency response.

It then dawned on me, that I'm living, we're all living, at the most decisively critical moment in pretty much the whole human story – kind of “wow!”

And, I realised that, as difficult as this unprecedented moment appears to be, and, as hard a sell, as “stop flying” is, this moment could actually bring out the best in me.

As in, when the whole human project is in jeopardy, there's no more worthwhile task, there's not much more enabling of my best, as a living human, than to work with others to keep that precious project going, to keep life, all life, in balance. Regardless of success.

Thanks.