

Airport Fire Fighter Strike in Australia

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Disruption looms at Australian airports on **April 15**. Rescue fire fighters have announced a **four-hour strike from 06:00 - 10:00 local time** at twenty-seven airports across the country – including the majors.

It seems the cause extends beyond just pay and conditions with **safety concerns over staffing levels** the United Fire Fighters Union has described as ‘dire.’

Here’s everything we know, and how to decode the inevitable RFFS Notams soon to grace your pre-flight briefing.

Impact to Ops

The strike will see RFFS categories simultaneously reduce as low as zero (more on these categories below).

While the exact impact of the impending strike isn’t clear yet, previous strikes have given us a good idea of what to expect.

Traffic delays could extend beyond the strike period as airlines scramble to re-schedule cancelled or delayed services, with the added addition of peak school holidays. For inbound traffic this means **delays and holding**.

The RFFS downgrades themselves will be **announced by Notam** closer to the time and may also affect the use of Australian airports as **ETOPS alternates**.

‘Leaked’ Controversy

The plot thickens over the alleged leaking of a safety assessment which supposedly identified **major flaws at several Australian airports** over a lack of staff, procedures, trucks and other frontline fire-fighting equipment for the type of aircraft using them.

If this is correct, YBBN/Brisbane, YPPH/Perth, YMML/Melbourne, YSCB/Canberra and YSSY/Sydney airports are all operating at **high levels of risk in some emergency scenarios** – something that Air Services

Australia (who is responsible for RFFS staffing) has denied. The Australian Aviation Authority (CASA) has also weighed in on the issue, and sides with Air Services.

The Fire Fighter Union has also claimed that in some cases, flights have been operating at regional airports (such as YMLT/Launceston and YBSU/Sunshine Coast) with **less than the minimum required RFFS staff on watch** – although we can't confirm this.

Regardless of who is correct, the two parties are locked in a row that has led to the upcoming strike.

RFFS Categories

The effect of the strike will become apparent in the next couple of weeks via Notams like this:

A5537/23 NOTAMN

Q) EGTT/QFFCG/IV/NBO/A /000/999/5134N00042E005

A) EGMC

B) 2307271800

C) 2307280600

E) RFFS DOWNGRADED TO CATEGORY 5. CREATED: 27 Jul 2023

17:58:00 SOURCE: EUECYTYN

If you're not familiar with what these categories actually mean, here's a quick rundown on how they work.

An airport's RFFS Category refers to the **largest aircraft** it is intended to receive (think length and fuselage diameter).

This dictates the amount of water, agents, vehicles and response time required to fight fires on planes of these size.

With that in mind, here are the current **ICAO RFFS Categories**.

Aerodrome Category (ICAO Index)	Min Number of Rescue and Fire Fighting Vehicles	Airplane Length [m]	Max Fuselage Width [m]	Water [L]		Foam Solution Discharge Rate [L/min]		Complementary Agents [kg]
				Performance Level A	Performance Level B	Performance Level A	Performance Level B	
1	1	$0 < L < 9$	< 2	350	230	350	230	45
2	1	$9 \leq L < 12$	< 2	1 000	670	800	550	90
3	1	$12 \leq L < 18$	< 3	1 800	1 200	1 300	900	135
4	1	$18 \leq L < 24$	< 4	3 600	2 400	2 600	1 800	135
5	1	$24 \leq L < 28$	< 4	8 100	5 400	4 500	3 000	180
6	2	$28 \leq L < 39$	< 5	11 800	7 900	6 000	4 000	225
7	2	$39 \leq L < 49$	< 5	18 200	12 100	7 900	5 300	225
8	3	$49 \leq L < 61$	< 7	27 300	18 200	10 800	7 200	450
9	3	$61 \leq L < 76$	< 7	36 400	24 300	13 500	9 000	450
10	3	$76 \leq L < 90$	< 8	48 200	32 300	16 600	11 200	450

Further Strikes Are Likely

Right now, April 15 is the only scheduled RFFS strike. However, if no deal is struck between the Fire Fighters' Union and Air Services Australia, we are likely to see more.

The good news is that we all also receive **advance notice** of any that are planned. We'll continue to

report those as they arise.

If you encounter disruptions during the upcoming strike, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us on news@ops.group.