

Analysis / Politics

Nearly all federal politicians have accepted gifts from Qantas, but not all have declared them

A Crikey analysis shows at least 92% of politicians are members of Qantas' chairman's lounge. But a bizarre Senate rule change means there are more that we don't know about.



SENATOR TONY SHELDON (IMAGE: AAP/LUKAS COCH)

Nearly all MPs and senators have accepted gifts from Qantas, and 92% of them have declared membership in the airline's exclusive chairman's lounge, a *Crikey* analysis shows.

Six parliamentarians have declared either they or their spouses own shares in Qantas, while others have declared gifts as large as 75,000 airline points and as small as a model aeroplane, according to the Parliament's register of interests and data from the transparency website [Open Politics](#).

Because of a 2019 change to Senate rules that allow senators to hold lounge membership without declaring it, the proportion of politicians who are members is likely larger than this analysis shows.

The declared members of the chairman's lounge include the entire Labor frontbench and most of the Opposition frontbench.

Only 21 federal politicians out of 277 have not declared any gifts from Qantas. A further two have declared interests in Qantas but no lounge membership. Liberal Senator David Fawcett — who



is a lounge member but has chosen not to declare it — reported getting an upgrade from economy to premium economy on a flight from Perth to London last July.

The other, Labor Senator Tony Sheldon — a prominent critic of the airline and its leadership under ex-CEO Alan Joyce — bought Qantas shares last September.

That was the same month Joyce announced he would [bring forward his retirement](#) after being grilled in the Senate about Qantas' record profits, customer dissatisfaction and alleged anti-competitive behaviour. Vanessa Hudson has since been promoted to CEO, and under her leadership the airline [last week reported](#) half-year profits had fallen 13%, to \$873 million.

Sheldon told *Crikey* he bought the shares in order to become an activist shareholder, although he had missed the 2023 annual general meeting due to a scheduling conflict.

“I bought 100 Qantas shares in September 2023, as reflected on the Register of Senators' Interests. With these shares, I now have direct access to shareholder information and meetings,” Sheldon said in emailed comments.

“After years of outsourcing and cost cutting, Qantas is unrecognisable today from the Spirit of Australia it once was. It's the most complained about company in Australia ... As a shareholder and a senator, I look forward to holding the board to account.”

The other declared shareholders did not respond to requests for comment:

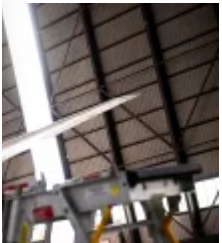
- United Australia Party Senator Ralph Babet
- Liberal Senator Claire Chandler
- Labor MP Ged Kearney, who declared her spouse held the shares
- Nationals MP Anne Webster, who declared her spouse held the shares
- Labor MP Josh Wilson, who declared his spouse held the shares

Sean Johnson, the former Liberal staffer and political integrity advocate behind the website [Open Politics](#), said declaring a Qantas lounge membership used to be a hard and fast rule for all federal politicians, until the Senate made changes to its own regulations in 2019. The [new rules](#) specifically say “access to airline lounges” does not have to be included on senators’ registers of interests, though MPs in the lower house still have to declare it.

“The registers almost certainly do not paint a full picture of Qantas largesse,” Johnson told *Crikey*.

Johnson showed *Crikey* a May 2023 email from Fawcett, the Liberal Senator, where he said: “I declared my membership of airline lounges for a number of years until the guidelines ... changed”.

Johnson has lobbied for stronger transparency rules, [arguing](#) an independent enforcement body should be established to hold politicians to account over the gifts they accept and declarations.



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When it was reported last year that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's son was a member of the chairman's lounge — Qantas' most exclusive membership tier, which is only available via personal invite — several politicians who had previously had access to the lounge announced they would renounce it.

The pollies who deleted Qantas lounge memberships from their registers of interests include:

- Greens MP Stephen Bates
- Greens MP Elizabeth Watson-Brown
- Greens Senator Barbara Pocock
- Independent MP Monique Ryan
- Independent Senator David Pocock

The other parliamentarians who have not declared lounge membership are:

- Greens MP Max Chandler-Mather
- Labor Senator Tony Sheldon
- Labor MP Sharon Claydon
- Labor MP Fiona Phillips
- Labor Senator Fatima Payman
- Labor Senator Karen Grogan
- Independent, former Nationals MP Andrew Gee
- Independent MP Bob Katter
- Independent, former Liberal Senator David Van
- One Nation Senator Pauline Hanson
- One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts
- LNP MP Luke Howarth
- Liberal MP Melissa McIntosh
- Liberal Senator Michaelia Cash
- Liberal Senator David Fawcett

- Liberal Senator Maria Kovacic
- Liberal Senator Dave Sharma (he was a chairman's lounge member during his time as MP)
- Liberal Senator Dean Smith

Other benefits from Qantas that various MPs and senators have declared include flight upgrades, frequent flyer memberships, model aircraft, and tickets to sporting, business and entertainment events.

Resources Minister Madeleine King has declared perhaps the most unusual gift from Qantas: 75,000 airline points, provided in November 2022 for an unknown reason.

King, a Qantas platinum one and chairman's lounge member, who has also accepted a chairman's lounge membership for her partner, did not respond to questions from *Crikey* about why she was gifted the airline points. According to the website [Point Hacks](#), 75,000 Qantas points would be enough to buy 13 business-class upgrades on domestic flights.

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Anton Nilsson is *Crikey's* federal political reporter. He previously covered NSW Parliament for NCA NewsWire, and before that,

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