

Qantas makes its first flight on refined cooking oil, to reduce reliance on traditional jet fuel



(AAP) Qantas CEO Alan Joyce holds the type of biofuel that will fuel one engine of flight QF1211, Australia's first commercial flight powered by aviation biofuel. Picture: Damian Shaw Source: News Limited

QANTAS has launched the nation's first commercial flight using a mixture of refined cooking oil, saying it would not survive if it relied solely on traditional jet fuel.

The Airbus A330 left Sydney for Adelaide using a 50-50 blend derived from recycled cooking oil and regular jet fuel in what the airline hopes will be the first step towards a sustainable aviation fuel industry in Australia.

"We need to get ready for a future that is not based on traditional jet fuel or frankly we don't have a future," Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce said.

"And it's not just the price of oil that's the issue -- it's also the price of carbon.

"From July, Qantas will be the only airline in the world to face liabilities in three jurisdictions, so our sense of urgency is justified."

Europe already imposes a controversial carbon tax on airlines, while New Zealand has a carbon tax that applies to flights within that country by Qantas' budget carrier Jetstar.

Australia's tax on carbon emissions comes into force on July 1.

Qantas said the biofuel, which has been certified for use in commercial aviation, has a "life cycle" carbon footprint about 60 percent smaller than that of conventional jet fuel.

Jet fuel is the largest operational expense for the Australian carrier, which in February announced it would slash at least 500 jobs and cut costs after an 83 per cent slump in first-half net profits.

In March it hiked its fuel surcharge for the second time in two months, saying its fuel costs were expected to rise by \$300 million in the six months to June 30 to \$2.25 billion.

The Australian government said it would help Qantas fund a study into the sustainable production and commercialisation of aviation biofuels.

Under the \$500,000 Emerging Renewables Program grant, Qantas will partner with Shell Australia to undertake a feasibility study into the long-term viability of biofuel feedstock and the production of low carbon aviation fuels.

"Today's flight, together with the feasibility study, represents an important step towards an Australian aviation industry powered by our own biofuels," Resources and Energy Minister Martin Ferguson said.

"This could be the beginning of Qantas becoming 'Flying Bio-Roo'.