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CROSS-CHANNEL FLIGHT PLANNING

1 Introduction

1.1 During the last two years, the CAA has evaluated reports that some VFR flight plans, filed for flights between France and the United Kingdom, have not been received at the UK destination aerodrome. Although these reports are infrequent, they nevertheless identify a significant safety aspect of cross-channel flight planning. The ability of the Air Traffic Service Unit at the destination aerodrome to be aware of an inbound flight is a key factor to alert search and rescue services, when appropriate.

1.2 The objective of this Circular is to highlight relevant procedures and to suggest some alternative action that pilots might wish to consider to ensure their flight plans have been activated.

2 Submission of a Cross-Channel Flight Plan

2.1 VFR flight planning procedures are detailed in the UK AIP ENR 1.10.

2.2 A Flight Plan (FPL) must be filed for all flights to or from the UK that will cross the UK FIR Boundary.

2.3 It is also advisable to file a FPL if a flight involves flying over the sea more than 10 nautical miles from the UK coast, or flying over sparsely populated areas where search and rescue operations would be difficult.

3 Pilots' Responsibilities

3.1 The pilot is responsible for submitting (filing) a FPL to the Air Traffic Service Unit (ATSU) at the departure aerodrome at least 60 minutes before clearance to start up or taxi is requested. The local ATSU will, if required, assist the pilot to complete the FPL. If there is no ATSU at the departure aerodrome, or the ATSU is not connected to the Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunication Network (AFTN), the pilot must ensure that the FPL is passed to the aerodrome's Air Traffic Services Parent Unit for onward transmission (see UK AIP ENR 1.10, paragraph 2).

3.2 If pilots send their FPLs by fax, or make use of a computer based FPL system, they should assure themselves that the FPL has been accepted and has been transmitted by AFTN on their behalf. A telephone call to the ATSU receiving the FPL, or contact with the ATSU at the aerodrome of departure, will enable pilots to confirm that their FPL has been received, accepted and transmitted.

3.2.1 Flight Plan Addressing;

The FPL should be addressed to:

- the destination aerodrome;
- all interested ATSUs en-route;
- the London FIR - EGZV/FRT;
- all foreign FIRs that the aircraft will fly through or land/depart from.

3.2.2 Flight Plan Route;

3.2.2.1 Pilots must ensure that well defined, significant, points are included in the FPL to indicate where the aircraft will cross the UK or near continent coastlines. This information should be shown in Item 15 (Route) or Item 18 (Other information: EET/).

3.3 Flight Plan Route - Flights to/from France:

3.3.1 Additionally, for flights to/from France, the French Authorities require the frontier crossing point (the UK/France FIR boundary position) to be included in Item 15 (Route) of the FPL. To assist pilots, the UK now includes the ATS route reporting points on the Southern England and Wales 1:500 000 chart. These can be used as a frontier crossing point. A position may also be shown as LAT/LONG, or as a bearing and distance from a route reporting point or navigation aid.

Example: Cap Gris Nez - RINTI
Cap Gris Nez - 51N00130E
Cap Gris Nez - RINTI23005
Cap Gris Nez - DVR16010

3.3.2 The EET for this position should be shown in Item 18 of the FPL (Other information) in the format EET/LFFF(elapsed time) or EET/EGTT(elapsed time), depending on flight direction.

Example: EET/LFFF0145 (UK/France) or EET/EGTT0020 (France/UK).

3.4 Flight Plan Route - Flights to/from Channel Islands;

3.4.1 Recommended VFR routes from the Solent CTA to the Channel Islands are shown in the UK AIP, in the Aerodrome Section - Jersey, page AD 2-EGJJ-3-1.

3.5 Flight Plan Messages - DLA; DEP; CHG and CNL;

3.5.1 It is important that, in the event of a delay of 30 minutes or more to the EOBT (Estimated Off Blocks Time), the pilot advises the departure aerodrome ATSU/Parent Unit so that a delay (DLA) message can be sent.

3.5.2 It is also important that the departure (DEP) message is also sent, as this activates the FPL. Although the ATSU has the responsibility to send the FPL and DEP message by AFTN, it would be sensible to check that this has been done, especially when departing from a non-UK aerodrome. If there is no ATSU at the departure aerodrome, or the ATSU is not connected to the AFTN, the pilot must ensure that the DEP is passed to the Parent Unit for onward transmission.

3.5.3 **Failure to activate the FPL could result in the destination aerodrome not being aware that alerting action should be taken.**

3.5.4 It is also important that when any changes or modifications are made to the original FPL, that a change (CHG) message is transmitted to all the addressees that will be affected by the change or modification.

3.5.5 Should the flight be cancelled, for any reason, it is equally important to ensure that a cancellation (CNL) message is transmitted to all the original FPL addressees.

3.6 Return Flight Plans filed from the UK

3.6.1 Pilots may elect to file their return FPLs at the same time as they file their outbound FPL. The normal requirement is to address the FPL solely to the aerodrome of departure. However, if the pilot also adds the addressee of the destination aerodrome, then this will ensure that the return destination in the UK is aware of the intended return flight, just in case the return FPL is 'lost' in transmission from the non-UK country. If the return flight occurs on a different day, pilots must ensure that the date of flight (DOF) is shown in Item 18 of the FPL.

Example: DOF/020922 (DOF/year/month/day = Date of flight 22 September 2002)

4 Flight Plan Forms

4.1 The CAA no longer provides packs of flight plan forms. However, the CA48 Flight Plan form can be obtained from the internet at www.ais.org.uk/CA48/CA48.htm

5 Comment and Feedback

5.1 The CAA welcomes comments from pilots and controllers on the practical operation of cross-Channel flights, especially if difficulty is experienced in the transmission of their FPLs. Pilots are reminded that an Occurrence Report should be filed if the circumstances are appropriate (such as the FPL not being received at the destination).

6 Safety Information Leaflets

6.1 Pilots are advised to read the CAA General Aviation Safety Sense Leaflet No. 20A (VFR Flight Plans), which contains some additional information and guidance for VFR flights to and from the continent. The leaflet is available for reading or downloading from the CAA website at www.caa.co.uk (select 'General Aviation'). Alternatively, some copies of this leaflet may be available from:

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This Circular is issued for information, guidance and necessary action.