PE1804/S
Five Aero Ltd submission of 4 November 2020

Aviation is a global and rules-based activity, requiring uniform standards and recommended practices for the operation of aircraft, airports and air traffic control. ATM Strategy relates to the provision of air traffic control and advisory services, all part of the Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP)[1] developed by the member states of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) the UN body for Civil Aviation and, reflected in the European ATM masterplan[2].

Implementation of ATM strategy is overseen nationally by the aviation regulator, in the UK this is the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) which is responsible for aviation safety, efficiency, operational standards and environmental practices. This includes Air Traffic Services (ATS), Flight Information Services (FIS), licensing of aerodromes, aircraft operators and air navigation service providers.

I am an independent advisor for ATM Strategy and a former DG of the ATM Trade Body CANSO, currently assisting the ICAO advising the Government of a large Member State of ICAO in its provision of ATM Services and Flight Information Services at Regional Airports. A former NATS Air Traffic Control Officer (ATCO), my operational assignments have included three locations in Scotland, for which an understanding of the special local conditions is necessary; Prestwick Airport, Kirkwall Airport, and West Freugh air base. I also spent several years as an ATCO at Jersey Airport. I have direct experience of the specific aviation and local needs of remote and island communities in Britain.

ICAO's GANP[3], Doc 9750, ensures that planned safety improvement and air navigation modernization through use of technology continues to advance hand-in-hand. This is intended to allow States and stakeholders to realize the safe, sustained growth, increased efficiency and responsible environmental stewardship that societies and economies require. The specific provisions for ATS are included in Annex 11[4] of the International Convention on Civil Aviation. The Standards and Recommended Practices in this document, together with the Standards in Annex 2, govern the application of the Procedures for Air Navigation Services — ATM (Doc 4444), and the Regional Supplementary Procedures — Rules of the Air and Air Traffic Services, contained in Doc 7030. These ICAO Documents form the basis of Regulation in the UK and more than 190 ICAO nations.

As the UK's aviation regulator, the CAA work so that: the aviation industry meets the highest safety standards, consumers have choice, value for money, are protected and treated fairly when they fly, through efficient use of airspace, the environmental impact of aviation on local communities is effectively managed and Carbon emissions are reduced.

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[1] Global Air Navigation Plan Portal
[2] Skybrary
[3] Global Air Navigation Plan Portal
[4] https://store.icao.int/en/annex-11-air-traffic-services

The CAA sets regulation reflecting government policy and is tasked to oversee the application of these regulations and their consistent interpretation. Aerodromes, Airlines and Air Traffic Control and advisory entities are accordingly licensed, operated and overseen by UK law.

Aerodromes serving remote and smaller communities often serve a vital local lifeline role. They also routinely have relatively few flights, limited navigation facilities and difficulty with recruiting and retaining qualified personnel, whether for air traffic control or flight information services, presenting particular difficulties in ensuring a consistent, reliable lifeline operation.

The European Aviation Safety Agency conducted a survey in 2015 with the purpose of addressing the provision of ATS within the EU legislation, based primarily on the transposition of ICAO provisions for Aerodrome Flight Information Services (AFIS) into EU law. The results of the survey, involving 27 countries in Europe, provide a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of AFIS[5] including the UK. This shows that AFIS, as proposed for Benbecula, is widely deployed across Europe.

The requirements for and oversight of the regulatory application of ATS, AFIS and Remote Tower Facilities are established, predicated on a safety first objective, and consistent with global provisions agreed by ICAO. In the UK, the policy and regulatory requirements for the provision of ATS[6], AFIS[7] and Remote Tower Operations[8] are prescribed by the CAA. The HIAL plan for Benbecula makes provision for Approach Control Services at a centralised facility. This concept of remote ATC operations is not new. For instance, the Approach Control Services for all London's airports, including Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and others, are provided from a remote centralised site at Swanwick on the south coast of England. This facility was established to improve on the cost, operating efficiency, and reliability, that was achievable with individual approach control facilities for each airport.

Heathrow also has a remote tower facility, in case of the unavailability of the main tower. Remote Tower Services are well developed, are in operational use and in process of introduction at a range of often remote locations around the world[9], including Canada, the UK and Ireland, across Scandinavia and New Zealand.

In my professional opinion, there is no reason to indicate that HIAL has fallen short of the criteria established by the CAA in its ATM strategy, nor that the CAA has been delinquent in its establishment or oversight of its obligations for civil aviation in the UK, including for HIAL, or that the operating licenses for the aerodrome operator or air traffic control provider, for which the related regulatory provisions are clear, have been compromised in any way.

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[5] European Aviation Safety Agency: Summary of the survey on Aerodrome Flight Information Service
[6] CAA Guide to how air traffic control works
[7] CAA information on UK Flight Information Services
[8] CAA Policy Statement on Remote Tower facilities
[9] https://think.aero/insights/resources/remote-and-digital-tower-operations/