



General Aviation

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Front cover:
Red Arrows Hawk
Photo: Damien Burke

Chairman's message

Poles apart

Two informative reports relating to general aviation have recently appeared in public that, for anyone with a keen interest on the future of GA in the UK and Europe and time to spare, make thought provoking reading. The first of these, issued by the Commission of European Communities entitled *An Agenda for Sustainable Future in General and Business Aviation* is quite uplifting, in that it very much promotes general aviation as a valued activity in the community, providing as it does employment and business opportunities, and aid to expansion of the internal market.

One of the most heartening sections is entitled "One size does not fit all" – the importance of proportionate regulation. The content includes the statement "...that the Commission undertakes to develop proportionate rules adapted to the complexity of the aircraft as regards both the maintenance and operation of aircraft, as well as crew licences..." Unequivocal and reassuring, you would think – so as the Commission undertakes to develop proportionate rules adapted to the complexity of the aircraft as regards both the maintenance and operation of aircraft, as well as crew licences...? Well, yes and no – possibly 'yes' for future deliberations coming down the line from EASA such as licensing and operations, but 'no' for areas of oversight that EASA has already provided the regulatory framework for and is practically complete.

This includes Part M, that part of a Commission Regulation that concerns aircraft maintenance. The second report referred to above is one that appeared only a couple of days ago, as I write; this is the Comment Response Document, or CRD, that has resulted from consulting the GA industry on the continuing airworthiness arrangements embodied in Part M. The document is some 750 pages long and consists largely of comments from interested parties, mostly aircraft (including gliders and other recreational aircraft) owners, operators and maintainers, each with an Agency response ranging from 'Accepted' to 'Not accepted'. A preliminary scan of the pages and Agency comments reveals that there are unlikely to be any significant changes to Part M as it affects GA. Why is this a problem? Because the implementing rules devised by EASA are aimed at all aircraft, including commercial air transport (a decision made by EASA in 2002, despite pleas to leave GA out for a time); of the 500 or so clauses in Part M only a handful, maybe 1 or 2%, refer specifically to commercial air transport excluding GA, and only one or two clauses mention small maintenance organisations. As far as GA is concerned, it is now saddled with a system that is not only largely inappropriate and disproportionate but hugely bureaucratic compared to what we have been used to, and, one way or another, this adds up to an extra cost burden on owners with zero beneficial impact on safety. For example, one such cost that will ultimately be borne by customers is the application fee to the CAA of £4,160 for a maintenance organisation to become a CAMO (Continuing Airworthiness Management Organisation), with no guarantee of success. So far, only about a half of the smaller M3 organisations that provide maybe the bulk of GA maintenance work have applied to carry on maintenance under the EASA banner, and only a quarter of these have applied to become a CAMO; that leaves a major proportion still sitting on the fence, even though we are already halfway through the transition period that ends on 30th September 2008. Some well known maintenance organisations have already pulled out of the business, leaving the work to be divided amongst a reduced pool – this may lead in a few months time to aircraft sitting on the ground with an overdue annual check awaiting a maintenance slot. What a dog's dinner!

It is easy to see that EASA Part M and the CEC philosophies are absolutely poles apart. Unfortunately, the Commission paper can only have an impact some time hence, after the pain has been inflicted on GA, but AOPA members can rest assured that with the help of IAOPA (Europe), EASA will have considerable pressure brought to bear with relentless persistence through all available political channels until the CEC aims and objectives for GA are eventually achieved.

On a happier note, in the AOPA office we are pleased to observe over recent months a significant increase in unsolicited donations, sometimes accompanying membership subscriptions – it gives us a warm feeling that we must be doing something right! Many thanks to all those who have contributed in this way, and I hope this encourages others to think about doing the same.



George Done