

Distribution: Members and Regular Participants of the NAT SPG and its Contributory Groups

Subject: NAT SPG Approval of the Recommendations of NAT DLM Temporary Accommodation Project Team

Dear Colleagues,

1. I refer to our letter ref: EUR/NAT 20-0296.TEC (NAE/CUP) of 19 June 2020 concerning the extension of a short-term accommodation of non-data link compliant aircraft in the area of the NAT Data Link Mandate (DLM) applicability until 30 September 2020 and the work of the DLM Temporary Accommodation (NAT DLMTA) Project Team.
2. Please be informed that, based on the recommendations made by the DLMTA PT, the NAT SPG has agreed to extend the accommodation until the AIRAC date of 25 February 2021 or until 50% of the traffic levels of 2019 has been reached.
3. This information should be promulgated through respective States' aeronautical publications.
4. The full report of the work of the NAT Datalink Mandate Temporary Accommodation Project Team (DLMTA PT) is attached for your information.

With best regards,

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NAT DLMTA PT OUTCOME

1. The NAT Datalink Mandate Temporary Accommodation Project Team (DLMTA PT) met via webex for three meetings, from 28 to 30 July 2020.
2. The group was provided with the background for the SPG decision, namely the decision to allow the accommodation of non datalink aircraft in DLM airspace. These measures had been triggered by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 public health contingency on the NAT operations and the dramatic drop in air traffic volumes and types of fleets and operations. The implemented measures allowed more flexibility for NAT airspace users, which were very appreciated in these times of crisis that was deeply affecting the whole global aviation industry.
3. As the expiry of the agreed accommodation was approaching, extension for another 3 months period until 30 September 2020 was coordinated and approved by the NAT SPG by correspondence prior to these meetings (EUR/NAT SL Ref: EUR/NAT 20-0296.TEC (NAE/CUP) dated 19 June 2020 refers).
4. The NAT SPG emphasised that this temporary measure was agreed and extended on the basis that the NAT service provider States and organisations would ensure the conduct of appropriate safety management work and that there would be no consequential safety and/or operational limitations within the NAT and its interface areas with other Regions.
5. Furthermore, the NAT SPG agreed that a Project Team would need to be established to develop criteria for reinstatement of the NAT DLM, methods and timelines for publication of this information and other related issues.

The Project Objective was to develop criteria for the extension or withdrawal of the NAT DLM temporary accommodation measures.

The Project Outcomes were:

1. Develop criteria for the extension or withdrawal of the NAT DLM temporary accommodation measures.
 2. Determine trigger actions for the extension or withdrawal of the NAT DLM temporary accommodation. (i.e. forecast traffic or actual traffic).
 3. Agree any methods and monitoring protocols that may be required whilst the temporary accommodation measures are in effect.
 4. Agree pre-notification timelines to ensure timely publication and notification of any extension or withdrawal of the temporary accommodation.
6. The draft documentation and conclusions would be presented to a joint NAT IMG/SOG forum to allow an SPG draft decision to be formulated and discussed prior to the end of the current 3-month extension on 30 September.

Discussions

7. The group started by looking at the current DLM accommodation until 30 September and agreed that there was no reason to recommend the withdrawal, based on the current and forecasted operational scenario for that period.
8. As for the extension, the group discussed the methodology to be used for the criteria that should be taken into consideration in the decision making process. The issue of assessing the benefit that is being provided by the accommodation was addressed, namely through the gathering of data that could provide an indication of who was benefiting and how. There was a concern that extension would encourage continued non-datalink equipage of certain aircraft fleets. On the other hand, arguments were made that the main focus should be on continuing the collaborative effort that had been put in place as we are living a very serious crisis, first of all, while the crisis persists, and second, while the appropriate safety management work by NAT service provider States and organizations ensures that there is no consequential safety and/or operational limitations within the NAT and its interface areas with other Regions.
9. This would imply addressing four main factors:
 - a. Safety;

The relaxation of the DLM was not considered to have caused any safety events, directly or indirectly. If this changes, then it must stop.
 - b. Operational Efficiency;

At some point, the flexibility that was provided with the DLM accommodation will start to cause constraints in the approval of requested profiles by operators and at that point, it would no longer be reasonable to keep the current situation.
 - c. Traffic Numbers;

Currently the traffic numbers are around 25% to 30% of 2019, and a relatively optimistic forecast expects 50% of the traffic by the end of the year. However it's an evolving situation. In any case, if the objective is a coordinated reinstatement of the DLM, the reference numbers should be the ones from Shanwick and Gander, considering the NAT operational environment.
 - d. ATCO Workload

The workload of operational teams was considered to have been managed acceptably during the DLM relaxation. Current traffic numbers seem to indicate that this is still the case.
10. Although there was no unanimity in regards to the methodology to be used, there were no objections to the recommendation to extend the DLM temporary accommodation. The project outcomes reflect a compromise between a safety and operational impact analysis that would allow the extension of the DLM accommodation as long as the DLM principals are in place, and the gathering of available data regarding the expected benefit from the DLM accommodation.

The Project Outcomes

1. Develop criteria for the extension or withdrawal of the NAT DLM temporary accommodation measures.
 - a. Allow the extension of the temporary accommodation, to provide any possible benefit to NAT airspace users, as long as the operational scenario allows ANSPs to conduct a safe operation, in respect of the DLM principles, namely without operational constraints.
2. Determine trigger actions for the extension or withdrawal of the NAT DLM temporary accommodation.
 - a. Propose the AIRAC date of **25 February 2021** or **50%** of the traffic levels of 2019, if reached before proposed AIRAC date, for the reinstatement of the DLM, based on the available forecasts and on operational experience of future traffic levels that would be acceptable in terms of accommodation.
 - i. Proposed AIRAC date provides opportunity for the NAT SPG to extend or withdraw the DLM temporary accommodation based on more current data for both overall volume and non DL demand
 - b. If, at any point, safety or operational issues arise, immediate action would be expected by ANSPs and further coordinated at ICAO level as soon as possible.
3. Agree any methods and monitoring protocols that may be required whilst the temporary accommodation measures are in effect.
 - a. The PT will have monthly coordination via correspondence (first week of each month), where the following data will be presented:
 - traffic percentage compared to 2019;
 - percentage of non equipped flights at DLM levels;
 - first collection of data by 10 August (PT recommendations to be delivered to IMG/SOG after that)

July					
FIR	Santa Maria	Shanwick	Gander	Reykjavik	New York
% Traffic (ref. same month 2019)	31,9%	26%	28%	28%	22,7%
% Non DLM traffic at DLM levels (Benefit)	2,8% (excluding Azores and Tangos)	9,2%	3,1%	12,9%	2,4%

- b. PT telcon 6 weeks prior to agreed AIRAC date (mid January), if agreed percentage in 2 a) is reached, or if non DLM demand for DLM airspace becomes negligible (e.g. below 1% of overall Nat traffic in DLM airspace)
- c. When conditions are met, notification to the IMG/SOG and from there to the SPG.

4. Agree pre-notification timelines to ensure timely publication and notification of any extension or withdrawal of the temporary accommodation.
 - a. Notification to operators, via NOTAM, of the reinstatement at agreed date, as soon as SPG agrees on proposal.
 - b. If withdrawal is required as per 2 b) notification of change at least 30 days in advance, if possible.

Recommendations to the SPG:

- Proposal as presented;
- Extension of the PT work until final decision, as per proposal.