



## **EU Pilot fatigue rules miss required effect**

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**18th February 2017 marks exactly one year of European airlines flying under the new EU Flight Time Limitations (FTL) rules – which were introduced to prevent pilot fatigue from endangering flight safety. However, widely differing interpretations of the rules, lack of official guidance on correct implementation, immature Fatigue Risk Management (FRM) systems in the airlines, and persistent fatigue problems in Europe’s cockpits are the current state-of-play. Aviation stakeholders are therefore called upon to jointly address these shortcomings.**

This 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary confirms that the complexity of the new EU FTL rules results in them being widely (mis)interpreted and incorrectly implemented. Many airlines and National Aviation Authorities (NAAs) are struggling how to interpret the rules and how to integrate essential points of the regulation into flight operations. As a result, some are opting for interpretations that simply fit their operations, schedule and productivity targets, irrespective of the fatigue impact on their crews.

“Particularly at risk are night flight duties of 10 hrs or more, extended flights of 14 hours, and standby-flight combinations with pilots being awake for more than 18 hours – but being expected to land their aircraft and passengers safely after such duties,” says ECA President Capt. Dirk Polloczek. “Although we have new rules, the old problem persists: many fatigued pilots in Europe’s cockpits.”

“[Half of airline pilots report fatigue which could jeopardise passenger safety](#)” warned just 2 months ago the London School of Economics (LSE) – a key finding of a [new Safety Culture study](#), carried out jointly with EUROCONTROL. It highlights that fatigue strikes 6 out of 10 European pilots – but that only 2 out of 10 pilots think that fatigue is taken seriously by their airline. This confirms [previous surveys](#) among pilots, which showed that fatigue is a reality in Europe’s cockpits.

“These findings are serious enough to serve as a wake-up call for European and national aviation authorities,” continues Polloczek. “But the problem is that many national authorities have insufficient resources and knowhow to properly oversee the new rules and their correct application. This is why EASA – the European Aviation Safety Agency – has a central role to play: one of guiding the work on a harmonised interpretation and implementation. We therefore call upon EASA to be more active and to provide clear interpretation guidelines to authorities, airlines and aircrew alike.”

This 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary also shows that proactive Fatigue Risk Management (FRM) systems need to play a more prominent role in airlines’ efforts to reduce crew fatigue. FRM is, in its essence, complementary to the prescriptive FTL rules, allowing airlines to ‘customise’ some aspects of the regulation. Those two components taken together were supposed to reconcile adequate fatigue protection and flexibility for airlines to operate efficiently.

“In reality, however, Fatigue Risk Management remains either misunderstood, poorly handled, inadequately overseen or simply used as a smokescreen to cover ongoing malpractice,” says Philip von Schöppenthau, ECA Secretary General. “Our own

benchmarking among almost 30 airlines shows that too few operators have actually implemented a functional and effective system to manage their crews' fatigue risk. It is therefore crucial that EASA and the NAAs invest more in training and auditing of the operators. Otherwise, FRM risks remaining a paper-tiger exercise with no real effect on fatigue."

This 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary is also the start of a [new scientific review](#) of Europe's FTL rules. Next month, a consortium of research institutes will kick-off their work, which is expected to result in a final report in Feb. 2019. "This review is crucial," says von Schöppenthau, "because already several years ago leading [scientific fatigue experts had warned](#) that the new FTL rules would be insufficient to counter the safety risks associated with pilot fatigue. We therefore welcome this study and hope it will help EU regulators to finally close the safety lacunae of today's rules."

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*Note to editors: ECA is the representative body of over 38,000 pilots from across Europe, striving for the highest levels of aviation safety and fostering social rights and quality employment for pilots in Europe. – Our Website: [www.eurocockpit.be](http://www.eurocockpit.be)*