

MEDIA STATEMENT

11 August 2020

For Immediate Release

South African Civil Aviation Authority Statement on the Calibration of Instrument Landing Systems at Airports in RSA

Johannesburg – It has come to the South African Civil Aviation Authority's (SACAA) attention that there are circulating reports that inaccurately suggest that aviation activities in South Africa are about to come to a screeching halt as a result of the airports instrument landing systems calibration status expiring at some airports.

The SACAA states the following facts to provide clarity and answers to questions that may emanate around this matter.

In providing such clarity, it is prudent to preface this by explaining what an Instrument Landing System (ILS) is and the purpose thereof in relation to the flying of an aircraft.

In a nutshell, an ILS is a ground-based navigational instrument system that provides guidance to an aircraft when approaching or landing on a runway when the pilot cannot see the runway due to bad weather.

Regulated safety protocols require that when an Instrument Landing System is not functioning, or its certification had expired, the affected airport must be downgraded to a lower instrument usage level. In addition, and as international protocol dictates, the status of the facilities at the affected airport are published via a notice to airmen (NOTAM), and this is aimed at assisting pilots to plan their flights safely, prior to departure. Most importantly, the ILS is just one of the few landing and take-off techniques that are used. This simply means that you can still land without an ILS, however, visibility on the runway must be determined first.

An Instrument Landing System can be non-functional for several reasons, which may include the following:

- The ILS approval certificate is expired which demands that the system is switched-off to avoid pilots depending on it to provide information for landing and take-off purposes, especially during bad weather; and

- The ILS may be defective, in which case there may be a need to switch it off pending maintenance and calibration, even if the calibration certificate expiry date is not yet due. As such the airport management is expected to maintain and service the systems to ensure that they work at all times.

Would flying stop in the absence of an Instrument Landing System? No. An Instrument Landing System is mainly used by pilots when landing during inclement weather such as when there is reduced visibility due to fog, rain, snow, etc.

Assertions that suggests that all ILS's at all South African airports are switched-off and not functioning, are misguided. Regulations prescribe that ILS certificates are valid for 150 days with an automatic tolerance of 30 days without the requirement for an extension application. Thereafter, an airport operator can apply for a 25 days extension in accordance with applicable civil aviation regulations. After the expiry of the 25 days extension, if the calibration of the ILS has not taken place, the operator can apply for an exemption, which can be granted for up to 180 days, provided that the system has a history of being stable during previous calibration intervals and that certain additional maintenance and monitoring measures are in place. This is a perfectly acceptable practice and is in line with global standards and practices.

OR Tambo International Airport has four (4) ILS's, and, as at 10 August 2020, two of these were switched-off because the exemption period lapsed. This airport therefore will neither be downgraded or closed as reported. In addition, King Shaka International Airport has been downgraded to a lower instrument meteorological usage level as a result of two ILS's being switched-off. Other airports affected are Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport and George Airport whose exemptions have also expired. These are the only ones that have been switched-off. The rest, even though they are also nearing expiry during the month of August, and later on in the year, are still operational.

In terms of bringing the expired ILS's back to service, calibration will need to take place to perform the necessary adjustments to obtain the required performance accuracy.

Following the fatal accident involving the SACAA aircraft and crew late in January 2020, the SACAA appointed a service provider to calibrate the landing and navigation equipment in the country, through an open tender process as prescribed by the National Treasury Regulations. The service provider, which is a South African company, was appointed for this service and a Service Level Agreement was concluded on 17 April 2020. Due to the fact that the service provider was going to utilise an aircraft that is based in Europe, they experienced major delays in receiving a Foreign Operator's Permit from the International Air Service Licensing Council, which was eventually granted on 19 June 2020. Due to further delays resultant from the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, the crew work permits, and visas were eventually granted, and the SACAA was duly informed on 31 July 2020.

According to the assurances given to the SACAA by the service provider the aircraft is expected to arrive in the country by the end of this week following an earlier promise that the aircraft will most possibly arrive on 09 August 2020. The explanation provided by the service provider was that they needed to ensure that Flight Inspection System had to undergo some maintenance as it has been operating during the delay period.

As soon as the aircraft arrives the calibration programme will prioritise those airports which are negatively affected to date.

The SACAA wishes to reiterate that there has been constant communication with all affected stakeholders to ensure that aviation operations continued safely. Hence, to date, there has not been any interruption in flying activities despite the switching-off, in line with regulations, of the affected ILS at the indicated airports.

-ENDS-

Issued by the South African Civil Aviation Authority

About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is a Schedule 3A public entity reporting to the Department of Transport established in terms of the Civil Aviation Authority Act, 2009 (Act No 13 of 2009) (the Act). In terms of mandate, the SACAA is tasked with promoting and maintaining a safe, secure and sustainable civil aviation environment, by regulating and overseeing the functioning and development of the industry in an efficient, cost-effective, and customer-friendly manner according to international standards. The SACAA is governed and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority Board.

=====

For more information contact:

Kabelo Ledwaba

Mobile Number: 083 451 2616