



FORUM SECRETARIAT

FORUM AVIATION POLICY MINISTERS MEETING

Port Vila, Vanuatu
16 July 2003

FORUM AVIATION ACTION PLAN 2003

Forum Aviation Ministers held their fourth meeting, in Port Vila, Vanuatu, on 16 July 2003 to consider a range of aviation policy issues.

2. The meeting was chaired by HRH 'Ulukalala Lavaka Ata, Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Aviation for Tonga. In attendance were Ministers from the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Australia, Kiribati, New Zealand, Palau, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands were also represented. Representatives from the Asian Development Bank, the Association of South Pacific Airlines, the Federal Aviation Administration, the International Air Transport Association, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and New Caledonia were also present.

3. Ministers recommitted themselves to providing policy guidance for the development of the Pacific aviation sector. Accordingly, Ministers undertook a review of progress in implementing the Forum Aviation Action Plan as formulated during their meetings in 1998, 1999, and 2001, and recalled that under the Forum Aviation Action Plan the following strategies had been pursued:

- (a) Economic Regulation and Liberalisation
- (b) Regional Safety Regulation Oversight Programme
- (c) Airspace Management
- (d) Airfreight for Export Promotion

4. Developments in these strategies are noted below, together with Ministers' decisions taken in respect of each.

Economic Regulation and Liberalisation

5. Ministers recalled that they had adopted a policy framework in the aviation sector that supports Forum Leaders' stated economic reform objectives, including:

- (a) encouraging private sector development and enhancing competitiveness of national economies, including the development of tourism

(b) pursuing open, liberal and transparent investment policies and working towards a common goal of free and open trade and investment.

6. Ministers agreed that there was a pressing need to facilitate air services in the region and help FIC airlines become more competitive with outside airlines and encourage greater efficiencies. As a further step in meeting Forum Leaders' economic objectives, Ministers fully supported unification of the regional aviation market and liberalisation of air services, to improve the availability of air transport services of all Forum member countries.

7. Ministers considered the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement, which had been developed at their request through the 1998, 1999 and 2001 Forum Aviation Policy meetings, and noted that the PIASA had progressed to its final state through negotiations by officials held in June and October of 2002. Ministers also noted that all outstanding issues had been resolved.

8. Ministers also welcomed work that had been conducted on acceptable mechanisms for support of essential services that would allow countries to maintain the ability to intervene when required to meet socio-economic development objectives and that were also consistent with PIASA, and requested that PIFS continue these efforts in this area.

9. To further these goals, Ministers agreed to endorse the PIASA for signature at the 2003 Forum by Leaders of Forum Island Countries that wish to become Parties, and inform the Forum Secretariat of their national approval processes for an air service agreement to facilitate planning for implementation.

Regional Safety Regulation Oversight Programme

10. Ministers recalled that they had adopted a policy framework for safety regulation which recognised that most Forum Island States are not in a position to develop and maintain their own skills base for safety inspection and certification, that safety oversight services could more effectively and efficiently be delivered through a collaborative mechanism, and that any collaborative programme must be cost effective and sustainable in the longer term.

11. The Ministers recommitted themselves to the need to improve safety oversight and to meet their obligations under the ICAO Convention on International Civil Aviation, by enhancing regional capacity and enabling economies of scale through capacity sharing, leading to financial sustainability.

12. Recalling their decision to establish a collaborative regional aviation safety oversight programme, Ministers noted with appreciation the successful establishment of the Pacific Aviation Safety Office and approval of the first Business Plan by the PASO Council of Directors.

13. To further support the development of regional capacity in safety regulation and oversight, Ministers recommended that those countries that are not members of PASO may wish to consider supporting the initiative by becoming members of PASO,

endorsed a loan proposal from the Asian Development Bank, requested a technical assistance grant for a financial feasibility study to be undertaken immediately, and recommended that current Council member states make appropriate resources available to ensure participation at future Council meetings.

Airspace Management

14. Ministers recalled that they had adopted a policy framework in which airspace of the Forum region would be managed cooperatively, efficiently and safely; that all Forum countries would have an interest in the management of airspace service provision across the region; and that the benefits flowing to States from service provision across their national and regional airspace would be optimised to the extent possible, recognising the interests of users and consistent with ICAO guidelines.

15. Ministers noted with appreciation the assistance that had been provided by many stakeholders in resolving the issues and supporting the efforts of Forum member countries.

16. Ministers recalled their decision to promote the evolution of commercial approaches to regional cooperation and cease further work on an intergovernmental approach to co-operative airspace management. Ministers also re-affirmed the importance of countries being able to make their own decisions concerning the management of their airspace.

Airfreight for Export

17. Ministers recalled that they had adopted a policy framework for cooperative development of airfreight for export promotion intended to maximise the value of exports. Ministers noted the importance of airfreight to the development of their economies

18. Ministers approved in principle a regional action plan that would facilitate the development of new services through elements of national and regional policy and strategic action, particularly by identifying ways for governments to facilitate private sector development of airfreight.

19. To further co-operation in this initiative, Ministers also recommended that national stakeholders consider the suggested activities and identify those that are appropriate to national circumstances; directed the Forum Secretariat and Forum Fisheries Agency to explore options for further co-ordination at the regional level; and note the model clause on air service cargoes for possible annexation to air service agreements as commended by the ICAO 5th Air Transport Congress.

Airport Infrastructure

20. Ministers considered the impact on some trans-Pacific services of the imminent closure of the airfield on Johnston Atoll, and agreed that alternative arrangements to allow the continuation of affected services should be established with great urgency. Ministers requested that the Secretary General of the Forum Secretariat write immediately to the appropriate US authorities requesting deferral of closure and consideration for equipment to be shifted from Johnston Atoll to Kiritimati Island and that the Forum Secretariat pursue all other possible avenues such as the Post Forum Dialogue on this issue, and request that ASPA and the Forum Secretariat, working together, give high priority to facilitating the establishment of appropriate alternative arrangement, reporting back regularly to officials, by circular, on progress made.

Conclusion

21. Ministers noted that, while the current environment is generating economic, safety and security challenges, regional co-operation provides an effective means to advance common goals. In this regard, Ministers re-committed themselves to work together in implementing the Forum Aviation Action Plan.

22. Ministers thanked the Government of Vanuatu for their excellent preparations and for hosting their meeting.

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