

ACARS Oceanic Clearances on the NAT

OPSGROUP Team
22 June, 2022



There is a revised NAT OPS Bulletin that was issued June 14. Bulletin 2020_001 is all about **ACARS Data Link Oceanic Clearances**.

It puts all the procedures for **CZQX/Gander, BIRD/Reykjavik, ENOB/Bodø, EGGX/Shanwick and LPPO/Santa Maria** into one spot, instead of having them spread between all the different individual ANSP NAT OPS Bulletins.

When we compared the old version of the Bulletin with this new one there aren't really any big differences at all. Essentially none, in fact. But since we recently confused ourselves a lot over all things ACARS related, here is a refresher summary of what it says...

Have a read of the intro first

Point 2.2 of the introduction says this:

“The ACARS Data link oceanic clearance service is provided by means of VHF and satellite to ACARS equipped aircraft via communications service providers ARINC and SITA. It should not be confused with FANS 1/A CPDLC.”

(I totally confused these earlier, despite having used both.)

“Operators intending to participate in the ACARS data link process are required to contact their communications service provider and indicate they would like to receive the service.”

So that means the likes of ARINC and SITA.

The Procedures (in short)

1. Put the **ACARS logon** in, along with your flight number and the OCA facility.
2. Make sure you request your clearance at the **right time** (not too early, not too late). Here is the current

table of timings:

OCA		Prior to OEP
Gander		90-60 minutes
Shanwick and Bodo		90-30 minutes
Santa Maria		At least 40 minutes
Reykjavik (entering from)	Stavanger and Scottish	25 minutes
	Murmansk	30 minutes*
	Edmonton	45 minutes*
		Rule of thumb for Reykjavik 20-25 minutes

Not too soon, not too late, or rule of thumb...

(This is the only change we spotted from the old one - Gander used to say 90-30 minutes, now it says **90-60 minutes.**)

3. Make sure your RCL has **all the right stuff** in it:

- The OEP (*this means Oceanic Entry Point, not to be confused with OAPs which mean old person*)
- Your ETA for the OEP
- The requested flight level
- The highest acceptable flight level you could reach by the OEP. *This goes in the free text section by putting MAX F123*

4. If you don't get some sort of **"RCL Received" message within 5 minutes** of sending it then you're going to have to use voice instead.

5. Once you get your clearance, **check it well**. That means checking the LATs and LONGs in your FMC. If the clearance doesn't match your flight plan, then both pilots should independently confirm the coordinates and points. If you don't like your clearance then negotiate by voice, otherwise send your CLA (clearance acknowledgement). If you don't have that function, do it with your mouth.

11. FLIGHT CREW CHECKLIST

1	Complete ACARS logon
2	Send the RCL
3	Ensure confirmation message is received
4	If error message received, revert to voice
5	Receive ACARS data link oceanic clearance
6	Confirm call sign in clearance matches the call sign in the flight plan
7	Confirm that route coordinates match the full Lat/Long coordinates in the FMS and on the NAT Track Message (if on the OTS)
8	Send CLA
9	Ensure confirmation message is received
10	If error message received, revert to voice

Some peculiarities with each of the OCAs

Gander

- If you're departing somewhere **less than 45 minutes** from your Gander OEP, then get your clearance 10 minutes before you depart.
- Sometimes you might get an ACARS oceanic clearance before you've even sent the RCL.
- If you fly an aircraft that is **not able to send an RCL**, then you can set yourself up for Gander's special service but need to do it in advance:
 - Get in touch with your comms service provider and NavCanada
 - Put AGCS in item 18 of your flight plan
 - Expect to receive your clearance automatically once you logon

Shanwick

- **You must not enter Shanwick without a clearance.**
- If you're flying between and **Irish and a Scottish airport**, its not very far, so might want to get your clearance before departure.
- You get **2 chances** with Shanwick. If at first you don't succeed (you don't get the RCL received confirmation) then try again.
- If you've left it too late and are **within 15 minutes of your OEP**, you ain't going to get your clearance via ACARS.

Reykjavik

- They don't give clearances via ACARS if you're **departing from an airport in Iceland, Greenland or the Faroe Islands**. Get it from whoever you're talking to on the ground before you go.

Santa Maria

- You don't need an RCL if you're **departing from the Azores**, you'll get it through the (VHF) radio or possibly get a CPDLC route confirmation before you head out into the great blue yonder.

Other helpful stuff in the bulletin

Inmarsat datalink probably won't work above **N82°**. Iridium and HF datalink should.

The flight level in the clearance is not a clearance to climb. ATC need to clear you, and need to make sure you reach it before the OEP. But... if you lose comms then this is the cleared oceanic flight level.

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