

Don't Climb! A Big NAT No-No

Chris Shieff
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DON'T CLIMB!

Clearance? Good job. Now: **DON'T CLIMB!** (or descend). ASK Domestic ATC for a level change. Your Oceanic Clearance is **not** a clearance to go to your Oceanic level.

Short story: One of the most popular pilot mistakes on the NAT is to start climbing or descending when you get your Oceanic Clearance (or send your RCL). Prior to the entry point, you are still with Domestic ATC. You have to ask them for any level

DOMESTIC SHANNON | OCEANIC SHANWICK

ASK! | OEP | FL370

FL 350

Last week, **Gander Oceanic** asked us to get the word out on this growing problem. More and more crews are getting this wrong, especially since OCR/RCL is starting to happen elsewhere on the ocean. The same issue is common on the other side of the pond, most frequently in the **Shannon FIR**.

What's the problem?

Pilots climbing without a clearance.

Why would we do that?

Because we think we have a clearance.

OK, tell me more

When you get your **Oceanic Clearance - or send your RCL**, it contains an Oceanic Entry Point, Flight Level, and Speed. From that point, that's what you should fly. But if you are currently at a different level to the Oceanic Cleared Flight Level, you have to **ASK** for the level change. That's really all there is to it.

Oceanic Clearance is not a Domestic Clearance

Your Oceanic Clearance is valid **only** from the Oceanic Entry Point (OEP). Take this example.

```
ACA123 CLRD TO LFPG VIA NEEKO 54N050W 56N040W 57N030W 57N020W PIKIL SOVED  
FM NEEKO/1348 MNTN F330 M082
```

Your Oceanic Clearance commences at NEEKO. You must be at FL330 by the time you reach NEEKO, and then track to 54N50W.

But, if you're still somewhere over Newfoundland at say FL320, you have to request higher from Gander Domestic ATC, before you climb to your Oceanic Level.

If you just decide to climb without asking, that's where your day will start to go wrong.

Got your Oceanic Clearance? Good job. Now: **DON'T CLIMB! (or descend). ASK Domestic ATC for a level change. Your Oceanic Clearance is **not** a clearance to go to your Oceanic level.**

Short story: One of the most popular pilot mistakes on the NAT is to start climbing or descending when you get your Oceanic Clearance (or send your RCL). Prior to the entry point, you are still with Domestic ATC. You have to ask them for any level change. Don't ruin your day!

ASK!

DOMESTIC SHANNON | **OCEANIC SHANWICK**

FL350 → **OEP RESNO** → **FL370**

Recent procedural changes to the NAT may also be compounding the problem, so let's take a closer look.

Wait, I thought Oceanic Clearances on the NAT were a thing of the past?

Soon soon, but not yet. While Reykjavik and Santa Maria have removed oceanic clearances, Bodø, Gander and Shanwick are still targeting December 4 for the big switch. Until then, expect to receive a conventional oceanic clearance when approaching their airspace.

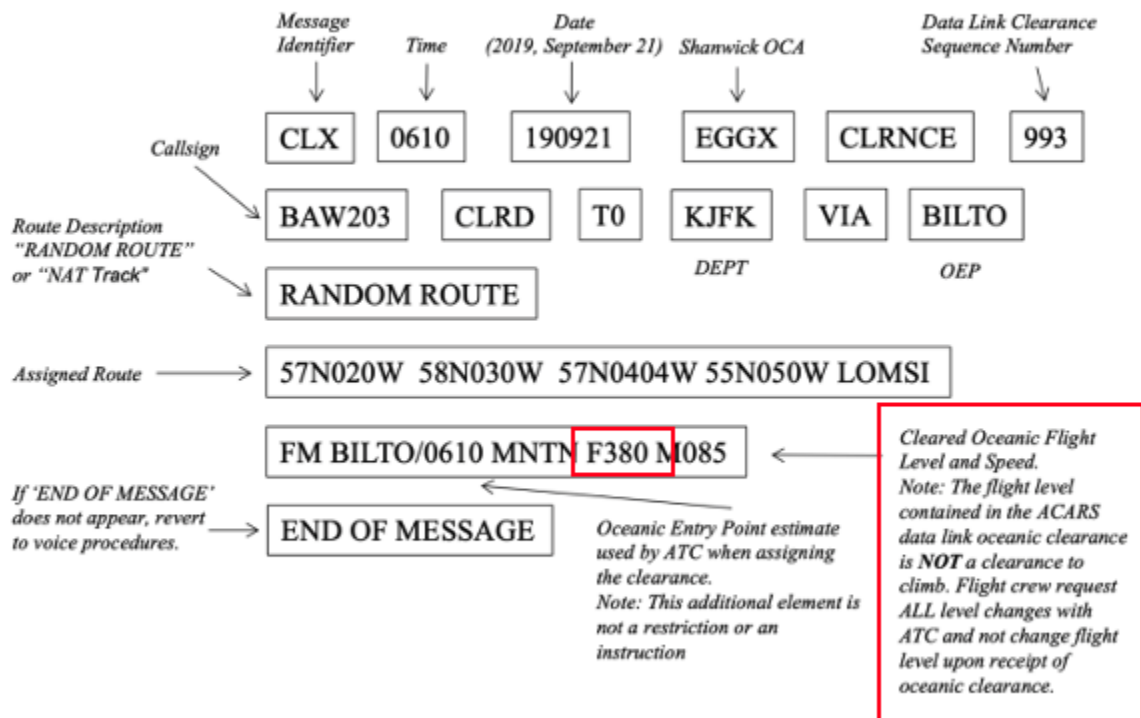
Oceanic Clearances

You can read all about them in NAT OPS Bulletin 2020_001 Rev 1, but the crux of the issue is found in Section 5.3 (Clearance Delivery):

... The flight level contained in the ACARS data link oceanic clearance is the "cleared oceanic flight level" for the purposes of complying with the lost communication procedures detailed in State AIPs, ICAO Doc 7030 (North Atlantic Regional Supplementary Procedures) and NAT Doc 007. ATC is responsible for providing a clearance to enable the flight to reach this flight level before reaching the OEP. If there is a concern, flight crews should contact ATC...

They made this handy picture too:

12. EXAMPLE OF ACARS DATA LINK OCEANIC CLEARANCES



In other words, the flight level contained in the ACARS datalink oceanic clearance is NOT a clearance to climb (or descend). You need to request this with your active ATC.

Why is this becoming a problem again?

We can only speculate - Gander aren't sure either. But we suspect the use of datalink, in addition to recent RCL changes may be the culprit. For instance, back in May, the automated response to an RCL message was changed (ironically to reduce any ambiguity). It now only reads "RCL Received by (ANSP)." In other words, the "fly current flight plan or as amended by ATC" bit was removed. A full oceanic clearance therefore contains more information, and the use of ambiguous phrasing such as 'cleared level' may be creating more confusion on the NAT than ever before.

Questions?

Comment below, or email the OPSGROUP Team for help!