

# South Africa Permits: Still a Mess

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## New Issue: July 2025

A new issue has emerged with South Africa's already miserably bad permit approval process (see original story below).

New issue: if there are **any changes** to your flight schedule (timing, routing, pax or crew details) you must have your original landing permit revalidated by the Department of Transport before departure. This even applies to crew-only, ferry, or maintenance flights. This must be handled by your local handler, who will also need a signed power of attorney document from you, and can take several days. Critically, the Department **only operates weekdays, with no weekend support** – so any changes late in the week can leave your aircraft stuck on the ground until Monday, racking up parking charges. Some operators have reported being **unable to depart** without unofficial after-hours help.

## Original Story: June 2025

We've had quite a few updates recently about the **ongoing chaos around landing permits and FOPs (Foreign Operator Permits) for South Africa**. While there was hope things were improving back in May, the latest reports show that the process is still painful.

### What's the issue?

Let's quickly recap the two main permits you might need when flying into South Africa:

**Landing Permit:** Issued by the Department of Transport (DOT). This is required for all foreign-registered aircraft, even private ones. It usually takes 3 working days to process.

**Foreign Operator Permit (FOP):** Issued by the South African CAA. This is meant for commercial operations, typically with more than 8 passengers or cargo over 1000 kg. It takes much longer to obtain (up to a month), and the paperwork can be extensive.

**The issue:** Even for flights where an FOP shouldn't be required under the official rules – for example, a private flight with fewer than 8 passengers – sometimes operators are still being asked to submit one. Sometimes this comes from local agents who've handled the same flights for years.

This mismatch is at the heart of the problem. The South African AIP says one thing (like “no permit needed for private flights”), the law technically says another, and what's being demanded in practice by officials is sometimes something else entirely.

One operator told us they submitted a full FOP package for a charter with just 6 pax, only to be told a week later it wasn't required.

#### **What changed?**

A new Minister of Transport took office, and a new Air Services Licensing Council (ASLC) was appointed. That might sound like progress – but according to folks on the ground, the new team found evidence of corruption, started clearing it out, and in the process created a massive vacuum. Staff were removed, new rules came in, but no one was properly trained. The result: total inconsistency.

**One local agent told us:** “It's bureaucracy for the sake of bureaucracy... Officials now interpret the rules however they want, and nobody has been trained properly.”

#### **Permit processing times?**

Here's the reality as it stands:

- **Landing permits:** Officially 3 working days, but expect 7-10 days minimum, and if anything is missing or unclear, the clock resets.
- **FOPs:** Can take a month or more, especially if your application gets bounced back for clarification (which it often does).
- All permit applications go through [permits@dot.gov.za](mailto:permits@dot.gov.za) – but your best bet is to use a local clearance company. Trying to deal with the DOT directly is not recommended.

#### **Corruption?**

There were credible reports of permits being deliberately delayed in hopes of bribes. The Department of Transport has acknowledged this and says reforms are underway – but in the meantime, honest operators are left paying the price in delays and uncertainty.

#### **What do you need?**

For most private ops under 8 pax, you *shouldn't* need a FOP – just a landing permit. But the advice from multiple members is clear: don't take anything for granted.

#### **Suggested checklist:**

- **Private flights (under 8 pax):** Landing permit only (in theory).
- **Charter flights or more than 8 pax:** Landing permit + FOP.
- **FOP applications** require 20+ notarised and certified documents – use a local agent or FBO to manage the process.
- Include a **detailed flight purpose** – vague terms like “business” aren't accepted anymore.

Local agents like Execujet, Onyx, and others are actively supporting operators with this, but even they admit it's a bit of a lottery.

We'll keep tracking this, but for now: expect delays, get your paperwork in early, and triple-check everything before submitting. And above all – don't trust the published timelines.