High Seas Airspace – What is it?

Mark Zee
15 March, 2016

Austria might have the worlds most perfect little piece of airspace. Wien (Vienna) FIR matches the countries' political boundaries perfectly. There is no ocean, no disputed boundaries, and no delegation of ATC.

For most others, it's not as straightforward. For some, it's beyond complex.

So how do countries determine what their airspace looks like? Airspace overhead the actual landmass belongs without question to the country, so that's easy.

Then, from the shoreline out to 12nm are the **Territorial Waters**, as agreed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982 – giving us "Territorial Waters Airspace".

The next chunk is the 12nm-200nm area – the **Exclusive Economic Zone**. In aviation, this sometimes has an effect on whether prior permission in the form of an Overflight Permit is required – Peru and Ecuador have in the past claimed this requirement. Beyond this, **International Waters** exist.

In aviation, the term of reference has become **High Seas Airspace**, and is taken to refer to anything outside the 12nm buffer where no country has sovereign jurisdiction over airspace. By international agreement, chunks of airspace are assigned to individual countries to provide an ATC service, because we prefer to have ATC watching us and providing separation, in comparison to trying to do it ourselves using

126.9 and TCAS.

As has been recently the case over the Black Sea, that agreement isn't always unanimous, and ICAO sometimes has to tread a difficult political line in assigning their preferred responsibility – last month Ukraine opened up routes in "High Seas Airspace" that Russia also wanted to have a crack at managing.

The Baltic Sea has long been a generator of news stories of **close encounters with the Bear** (Tu-95), this is because of the multitude of small chunks of High Seas Airspace that allow flights out of Russia towards the UK and Europe. ICAO is **concerned at the rising incidences of conflict** between civil traffic (that's us) and military flights over the Baltic.

These military flights operate under **Due Regard** – but **often don't file flight plans** and ATC know nothing about them until they are pretty close to you. You're unlikely to see them on TCAS either. So, that regard is not so high.

We'll continue the next time with a look at "No FIR Airspace" – those chunks of High Seas airspace where nobody is in control, mysteriously marked "XXX" on our charts.

Caution Wake Turbulence: New Rules for the EU

Mark Zee
15 March, 2016

What Wake Turbulence Category is a B757? That long favoured question by Dispatch Trainers and ATC Instructors will become a thing of the past under new rules slowly being introduced in Europe, where the current four (Light, Medium, Heavy, Super) will become **six**. The first place you will see this happening is at LFPG/Paris Charles de Gaulle and LFPB/Paris Le Bourget, from 22 MAR 2016.

Those **six new categories** are Light, Medium (with Lower and Upper), and Heavy (with Lower, Upper and Super). The rules are part of the RECAT-EU project, with the intention of squeezing more traffic into busy European Airports by applying more precise turbulence separation rules.

The separation minima are determined specific to each Aircraft Pair. For example, at the moment, an A330 following a B777 (Heavy behind heavy) requires 4 miles in trail. With the new rules, that is reduced to **3nm**. An A320 can now follow 4 miles behind a B777, instead of the current 5nm.

There are no Flight Planning Changes (continue to use /L,M,H,J for the ICAO Category). For crews, you'll notice the smaller separation, but there are no changes to callsigns or pilot obligations – for now.

New Wake Turbulence Categories
Phased Introduction from 22MAR2016
\\\ Flight Service Bureau ®

	Max Take Off Weight (**MTOW**)	Wing Span
SUPER **HEAVY**	**100,000** KGS +	> 72m
UPPER **HEAVY**		60 – 72m
LOWER **HEAVY**		< 52m
UPPER **MEDIUM**	**15 – 100,000** KGS	> 32m
LOWER **MEDIUM**		< 32m
LIGHT	**15,000** KGS -	

SUPER HEAVY	UPPER HEAVY	LOWER HEAVY	UPPER MEDIUM	LOWER MEDIUM	LIGHT
A380	B777*	B757*	B737-6	B737-3	D328
	B747*	B767*	B737-7	B737-4	FA10/20
A124	B787*		B737-8	B737-5	C560
			B737-9		C56X
	A340*	A310*	A318	all ATR	C650
	A330*	A300*	A319	all DH8	C680
	A350*		A320	all BAE	H25B
			A321	all CRJ	LJ35/45
	IL96	C135	C130/C160		SF34
	AN22	MD11/DC10	all MD80	EMB 135	SW4
		IL76	MD90	at 195	BE40
	* all current types	TU95/22	TU204		EMB120
			BCS1	F70/F100	
		*all types	BCS3	GLF2/4	
				CL30/60	

References:

- **France AIC 03/16**
- **Eurocontrol RECAT-EU Project**