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Guidance on flight plans and VFR flights in airspace classes C and G and information on the provision of Air Traffic Control, Flight Information and Alerting Service therein

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1. Introduction

This notice is for pilots conducting their flights in Ireland under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and provides information and guidance on:

- The types of Air Traffic Service (ATS) provided in controlled airspace (ICAO Class C) and uncontrolled airspace (ICAO Class G),
- Units providing ATS and the respective airspace,
- Flight planning and pilots' responsibilities,
- Light aviation sporting activities.

2. Air Traffic Services (ATS)

There are three types of Air Traffic Service available:

- Air Traffic Control Service,
- Flight Information Service,
- Alerting Service.

3. Air Traffic Control (ATC) Service

Air traffic control service shall be provided:

- to all IFR flights in airspace Classes A, B, C, D and E,
- to all VFR flights in airspace Classes B, C and D,
- to all special VFR flights,
- to all aerodrome traffic at controlled aerodromes.

A 'controlled flight' means any flight which is subject to an air traffic control clearance. Flights in controlled airspace, airspace class C, are provided with an ATC service and are subject to an air traffic control clearance.

Aircraft operated as a controlled flight shall maintain continuous air-ground voice communication watch

on the appropriate channel and shall establish two-way communication with the appropriate ATC unit in order to request an ATC clearance. An ATC clearance is required before entry into controlled airspace. If you have not received a clearance to enter controlled airspace from the relevant ATC unit, you must remain clear of controlled airspace.

An ATC unit will issue clearances to ensure that separation exists between IFR flights and VFR flights in controlled airspace. Clearances to VFR flights in airspace class C does not imply any form of separation between VFR flights. The ATC unit will provide the pilots of VFR flights with traffic information on other VFR flights. For the case of special VFR flights, separation will be provided unless otherwise prescribed by the competent authority.

It is vital that pilots of VFR flights comply with ATC clearances. Where a pilot of a VFR flight cannot comply with an ATC clearance, or if they are having difficulty maintaining VFR, they should advise the ATC unit of this as soon as practicable. This will enable the ATC unit to offer an alternative clearance.

All flights operating in airspace designated by the competent authority as a transponder mandatory zone (TMZ), promulgated in the AIP, shall carry and operate SSR transponders capable of operating on Modes A and C or on Mode S, unless in compliance with alternative provisions prescribed for that particular airspace by the Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP).

4. **Flight Information Service**

Flight information service (FIS) shall be provided by the appropriate air traffic services (ATS) units to all aircraft which are likely to be affected by the information and which are:

- provided with air traffic control service; or
- otherwise known to the relevant air traffic services units.

An aircraft becomes known to the ATS unit through the activation of a flight plan or where no flight plan is filed, by contacting the ATS unit on the appropriate ATS frequency.

Where a **flight plan has not been filed** and the pilot is in receipt of a FIS, the ATS unit should be informed by the pilot, when the flight detail is complete or when they are leaving the frequency. This will assist the ATS unit in its provision of flight information and alerting services. Where a flight leaves a FIS frequency without contacting the ATS unit, it will be considered to be operating normally. In that instance, an alerting service will only be initiated where an ATS unit becomes aware that it is required.

Where ATS units provide both FIS and ATC services, the provision of ATC shall have precedence over the provision of FIS whenever the provision of ATC so requires.

ATC and FIS are generally combined and provided from the same ATS position. During times of high activity in the FIR, a FIS position can be opened as a standalone position. To help plan for this, organisers of fly-ins or other events in the FIR, which may cause an increase in general aviation (GA) traffic availing of a flight information service and alerting service, are encouraged to contact the relevant ATS unit(s) in advance to advise of the event.

Use of Surveillance for the Provision of FIS in Uncontrolled Airspace (Class G)

Surveillance equipment may be used to assist with the provision of a FIS to aircraft in uncontrolled airspace, this is not an Air Traffic Control service.

At all times when flying in uncontrolled airspace, responsibility for the safe conduct of the flight rests with the pilot in command. Traffic information provided by an ATS unit to VFR flights in uncontrolled airspace, is limited to **known flights** along the route of flight.

All flights operating in airspace designated by the competent authority as a transponder mandatory zone (TMZ), promulgated in the AIP, shall carry and operate SSR transponders capable of operating on Modes A and C or on Mode S, unless in compliance with alternative provisions prescribed for that particular airspace by the ANSP.

5. Alerting Service

Alerting service shall be provided by the air traffic services units:

- for all aircraft provided with air traffic control service,
- in so far as practicable, to all other aircraft having filed a flight plan or otherwise known to the air traffic services,
- to any aircraft known or believed to be the subject of unlawful interference.

In so far as practicable means that the aircraft is known to the relevant ATS unit. This can be achieved by telephoning the relevant ATS unit to advise that the flight is about to commence or by calling the relevant ATS unit as soon as possible after airborne.

When a pilot who has **not filed a flight plan** contacts an ATS unit requesting a radio check or information on local weather / traffic, the flight tracking ability of the ATS unit is limited. In such circumstances the ATS unit can only provide alerting service to aircraft if it is requested by the aircraft or if it becomes known to the ATS unit that such a service is required.

6. Unit Providing ATS

State Airports

State airports are established at:

- Dublin (EIDW)
- Cork (EICK)
- Shannon (EINN)

A FIS is provided by these ATS units within their geographical areas of responsibility.

Flights operating in the Shannon FIR Class G airspace under the Dublin CTA, should contact Dublin Information for traffic information. If no contact is received, traffic can contact Shannon Information who will relay the information.

Non-State Airports

Non-State airports are established at:

- Donegal (EIDL),
- Sligo (EISG),
- Ireland West Airport Knock (EIKN),
- Kerry (EIKY),
- Waterford (EIWF),
- Weston (EIWT).

During the promulgated hours of operation of the non-State airports, the local airspace is designated as Class C (controlled) Control Zone (CTR), and an ATC service is provided by the ATC unit. Hours of service are promulgated in the AIP or by NOTAM.

A clearance from the aerodrome ATC unit is required to enter the CTR or additional controlled airspace. If intending to fly near these airports, pilots should contact the relevant ATS unit at the airport to establish the status of the airspace. A clearance must be obtained from the ATC unit before entering controlled airspace.

During the promulgated hours of operation for Donegal, Sligo and Waterford airports, for operational reasons the local airspace may revert to Class G. A NOTAM will be issued when this occurs, and an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS) may be provided by the airport ATS unit.

Outside of promulgated hours of operation of the non-State airports (except Weston), the airspace reverts to uncontrolled (Class G) airspace, and Shannon ATS unit provides a FIS and an alerting service. The airspace charts and hours of operation are contained in either AIP Ireland or in relevant NOTAMs, and it should be noted that times may vary to facilitate early arrival or delayed departures.

Sligo and Waterford Airports

Outside the promulgated Aerodrome hours of operation of Sligo and Waterford airports, an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS) may be provided at short notice, in support of helicopters on SAR/HEMS/Training missions based at Sligo and Waterford airports. The hours of operation of AFIS are promulgated by NOTAM. Times may vary to support helicopters on SAR/HEMS missions based at Sligo and Waterford airports. Pilots will be provided by Sligo and Waterford AFIS with an Aerodrome Flight Information and Alerting Service while operating in the local airspace.

Note: Sligo and Waterford airspace are designated as a Transponder Mandatory Zone (TMZ) and Radio Mandatory Zone (RMZ), see detail as promulgated in AIP, respective AD sections.

Weston Airport

Weston airport is located within the Dublin CTR and as such is always encompassed by controlled airspace. During Weston airport hours of opening, the ATC service in the Weston Area of Operation (AOR) is provided by the ATS unit at Weston airport. Outside of these hours, the aerodrome is closed, and the ATC service is provided by the ATS unit at Dublin airport.

Casement Aerodrome

The Military ATS unit at Casement Aerodrome will, when the appropriate EI Restricted Areas are active, provide the ATS inside certain portions of the Dublin CTR. See AIP Ireland for more details.

Custume Barracks Athlone

There is long-term TRA situated over Athlone to facilitate the Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) operations out of Custume Barracks. This is subject to an airspace change proposal and a permanent airspace restricted area will likely be established in the future.

7. **Flight Plans**

Information relative to an intended flight or portion of a flight, to be provided to air traffic services units, shall be in the form of a flight plan. The term 'flight plan' is used to mean variously, full information on all items comprised in the flight plan description, covering the whole route of a flight, or limited information required, inter alia, when the purpose is to obtain a clearance for a minor portion of a flight such as to cross an airway, to take off from, or to land at a controlled aerodrome.

A flight plan shall be submitted prior to operating:

- any flight or portion thereof to be provided with air traffic control service,
- any IFR flight within advisory airspace,
- any flight within or into areas, or along routes designated by the competent authority, to facilitate the provision of flight information, alerting and search and rescue services,

- any flight within or into areas or along routes designated by the competent authority, to facilitate coordination with appropriate military units or with air traffic services units in adjacent States in order to avoid the possible need for interception for the purpose of identification,
- any flight across international borders, unless otherwise prescribed by the States concerned,
- any flight planned to operate at night, if leaving the vicinity of an aerodrome.

A flight plan shall be submitted, before departure, to an air traffic service reporting office (ARO) or, during flight, transmitted to the appropriate air traffic services unit or air-ground control radio station.

Unless a shorter period of time has been prescribed by the competent authority for domestic VFR flights, a flight plan for any flight planned to operate across international borders or to be provided with air traffic control service or air traffic advisory service shall be submitted at least 60 minutes before departure, or, if submitted during flight, at a time which will ensure its receipt by the appropriate ATS unit at least 10 minutes before the aircraft is estimated to reach:

- the intended point of entry into a control area or advisory area, or
- the point of crossing an airway or advisory route.

Abbreviated Flight Plan

An abbreviated flight plan transmitted in the air by radiotelephony for the crossing of controlled airspace, or any other areas or routes designated by the competent authority, normally contains, as a minimum: call sign, type of aircraft, point of entry, point of exit and level. This flight plan is valid for the duration of the crossing of controlled airspace or route. Once clear of the relevant controlled airspace or route, ATS will consider the flight plan as closed.

International VFR Flights

A flight plan is mandatory for international VFR flights.

If departing on an international VFR flight from an aerodrome located outside controlled airspace, the appropriate ATS unit must be advised of the departure of the aircraft. This can be done in advance by telephone or after the aircraft is airborne, by R/T. The ATS unit will then ensure that a departure message is sent to all relevant ATS units, thus ensuring that a FIS and an Alerting service will be provided until the FPL is closed.

Flight Plan Closures

Temporary FPL closure is provided for in ICAO Document 'PANS ATM DOC 4444'. Where a flight advises that it is executing an intermediate stop, the provision of ATS cannot resume until the pilot advises the ATS unit that:

- The flight is about to recommence (by telephone).
- The flight has recommenced (by R/T).

Note: Flight plans that have been activated must be closed.

If an activated flight plan is not closed it may lead to Alerting action being initiated. This action may be anything up to and including the launch of a SAR Helicopter. Such resources are valuable and costly. Pilots are strongly advised to adhere to flight plan closure requirements in order that search and rescue resources remain available to those who really need them.

8. Light Aviation Sporting Activities

Pilots of VFR flights should be aware that significant light aviation sporting activities, such as ballooning, gliding, parachuting and micro light flying, take place on a routine and non-routine basis within the Shannon FIR.

Where the activity is routine and has been notified to the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), pilots will not be informed by ATS units providing a FIS, as the details, including coordinates, of any such activities are published in AIP Ireland ENR 5.5 Section 6.2.

Where the activity is non-routine and has been notified to the appropriate ATS unit providing a FIS, pilots that may be affected will be provided with information on the activity.

Non-routine activities may also take place without being notified to the IAA or ATS units. Consequently, the FIS unit concerned will be unable to provide details of the activity.

Pilots should always exercise caution when in the vicinity of areas of activity and should avoid flying through areas of parachute activity.

9. Supplementary Information

Phone Numbers for the activation/closing of FPLs:

Flights operating in the area of responsibility of Shannon ATS:

Phone: 00 353 61 770725

Phone: 00 353 61 770700

Flights operating in the area of responsibility of Dublin ATS:

Phone: 00 353 1 806 7400

Flight plans may also be activated once airborne, by R/T, on the appropriate ATS/FIS frequency.