

# European Campaign to control noise from light aircraft



## The UECNA Motions

On 1 April 2006, the AEF attended a meeting in Paris that brought together residents' groups from airports around Europe under the banner of UECNA (Union Européenne Contre les Nuisances Aérienne). The afternoon session was dedicated to general aviation; specifically, to the consideration of motions proposed by a French umbrella body which would form a petition to the European Commission and Parliament. Following discussion on the day and in subsequent e-mails, four motions (with accompanying 'argumentations') were adopted and rendered into English, French and German. On 30 May they were sent to the President of the European Parliament with a request that he pass them on to the Commissioner for Petitions; they were also sent to the relevant civil servants within the European Commission. The motions were:

### Motion N°1

*Intrusive activities: formation flying, aerobatics, glider tugs and aircraft used for parachuting etc. for which aircraft leave airfields for less than one hour should be prohibited, with immediate effect, on Saturdays from 12 noon and throughout the day on Sundays and public holidays.*

### Motion N°2

*All aircraft which carry out these activities must be fitted with effective noise reduction equipment (eg silencers and multi-bladed propellers) before the end of 2009, and the various administrative processes for their re-certification should be speeded up and preferably harmonized across the EU.*

### Motion N°3

*Flight paths should be determined in consultation with local residents in order to minimise nuisance and wherever possible to transfer the noisiest activities ('touch-and-go', towing of gliders, parachuting, aerobatics) to airspace away from built-up areas. The use of flight simulators should be recommended.*

### Motion N°4

*Methods for tracking and controlling the flight paths of aircraft performing 'touch-and-go' operations should be put in place by the civil aviation authorities wherever possible and sanctions should be taken against offenders.*

The following justifications were also included within the petition.

(1) **Flying restrictions on the most noisy activities, during certain weekend periods**

*Flying restrictions should be defined for the entire EU during weekend periods, for training and personal leisure flying, in particular for aircraft carrying out repetitive circuits (“touch and go”) at low altitude over populated areas. All training flying activities would not be impacted by this restriction because repetitive circuits represent only fifty percent of overall flying training. For more than ten years, many residents’ associations have tried to obtain such restrictions through direct negotiations and promises of self-regulation on the part of aircraft owners and users. This approach has generally been ineffective.*

(2) **Noise abatement at source**

*Noise is certainly the most intolerable nuisance caused by light aircraft. In fact most light aircraft currently flying are either not equipped with silencers or are equipped with old and inefficient devices. The noisiest light aircraft should be equipped as soon as possible with noise reduction kits: improved silencers and multi-bladed propellers. These devices are available on the European market. This measure should be applied to all light aircraft whether they are manufactured, or assembled by amateurs (self-build kits).*

*Noise regulations more stringent than ICAO standards exist already in some countries, for example in Germany (federal law of January, 5, 1999). They could usefully be extended to the entire EU. At the same time, that would help European countries to progress towards more unified legislation on this particularly sensitive subject.*

*Public authorities should also take measures in order to encourage aircraft owners to make use of flight simulators and to replace their old aeroplanes with “new generation” machines which are quieter and less expensive to operate.*

(3) **Transfer of repetitive circuits away from built-up areas**

*Airfields are often surrounded by built-up areas and repetitive circuits are often carried out at low altitude in the vicinity of, or directly over residential areas. In some cases these training flights could be moved away over uninhabited areas, with pilots returning only for landing.*

(4) **Flight paths control**

*Aircraft take-offs and landings as well as repetitive circuits have to keep to well-defined paths. However light aircraft flights are rarely controlled by civil aviation authorities even if technical possibilities exist. Furthermore sanctions are very rarely taken against offenders.*

## **The AEF response**

The petition has been sent not only to European officials but (in France at least) to national parliamentarians also. AEF wished to consult its members before proceeding further with national campaigning, and accordingly on 17 July a special meeting was held to discuss the motions, the AEF response to them and the best method of lobbying for their adoption. Tim Thomas, the AEF's General Aviation Caseworker, chaired the meeting. Full minutes are available on request.

Firstly, it was clarified that at this stage, the text of the motions could not be substantially altered, since they had already been sent to EU officials (although minor amendments could be made for clarity). Nonetheless, it was recognised that the petition stage was only the beginning of a lengthy process, and that there would be plenty of scope for debating alterations on the road to securing legislation.

The motions themselves were broadly welcomed by those present although there was a feeling that definitions would need to be tightened. This was particularly the case with Motion no.1, and there was a lengthy debate about what activities exactly we were seeking to restrict. There was a consensus that circuit flying caused the greatest nuisance to local residents, but no clear agreement about how to define it. There was also a minority opinion that seeking to ban these activities at weekends would lead to the closure of some airfields, and possibly undesirable housing development as a result.

Fairoaks Environmental Consultative Committee also proposed two further motions which were discussed and agreed upon:

Motion N°5 All noise generating activities, such as engine testing, should be completed between 9am and 5 pm on weekdays and appropriate noise suppression measures taken.

[It was noted here that it would be necessary to add 'lasting over [eg] 2 mins' after 'activities' in order to permit necessary pre-flight engine running but restrict genuine engine testing.]

Motion N°6 Aircraft engine cut-out tests should be fully recorded and performed in airspace over non built-up areas.

A seventh motion from FECC, to place on aerodromes a 'Duty of Care' to reduce their noise impact on local communities and to draw up Noise Amelioration Plans, was warmly welcomed but many felt it represented an AEF proposal for how motions 1-6 could be implemented in the UK, rather than a motion in its own right:

Motion N°7 Legislation to be introduced to give every aerodrome a Duty of Care, to reduce noise impact on local residents. This will require the airport to produce a 'Noise Amelioration Plan' (NAP), to detail how the measures in the motions above are implimented and monitored, to reduce noise impact on local residents. The NAP should additionally include monitoring of all aircraft movements, including helicopters and fixed wing, 'Nuisance Factor' figures for all aircraft based at the airport and a comparison with the quietest alternative aircraft, with justification why

the quietest are not being used, plans for future noise reduction measures and channels for complaints/enquiries. The NAP will be produced bi-annually by the airport and be housed with an appropriate local authority, such as the Trading Standards Office and be available for inspection by residents online.

We would welcome any other members' views on the proposals, so please send any comments or suggestions to the office.

## **Next steps - lobbying from AEF members**

The UECNA motions represent the first European-wide co-ordinated effort to tackle the problem of noise from light aircraft. The UK Government has repeatedly declined to pass legislation in this area, or use its existing powers, and it is most likely that it would only do so when required by a European Directive.

Lobbying should therefore be carried out at the European, as well as the UK level. Unfortunately, as with the UK Government, there is very little activity at the European Commission or Parliament over the summer period, so we will be asking members to write to those institutions, as well as to their own MEPs and MPs, when they return in the autumn.

The AEF plans to lobby all the main political parties, including bringing it to the attention of the Conservative Party's 'Quality of Life' group considering the future of aviation.

The idea of working together with some of the more co-operative airfields was also discussed at the meeting. It was noted that there are several general aviation airfield operators who have shown themselves to be sympathetic to residents' concerns, and that it could be to our advantage to work with the more progressive members of the industry, perhaps through some sort of 'demonstration airfield' scheme. A number of cases of good practice were highlighted at the meeting and we would welcome members' suggestions of any further examples.