

STABILIZED APPROACH CRITERIA AND PREVENTION OF UNSTABILIZED APPROACHES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The conduct of a stabilized approach is a fundamental element of safe aircraft operations and is globally recognized as a key defense against approach-and-landing accidents (ALAs), including controlled flight into terrain (CFIT). International safety studies have identified that unstabilized approaches contribute significantly to such accidents, often resulting from inadequate planning, high workload, adverse weather, or non-compliance with standard operating procedures (SOPs).
- 1.2 In accordance with ICAO Annex 6 — Operation of Aircraft, operators are required to establish and comply with CAAF-accepted or approved standard operating procedures and operations manual procedures giving effect to these principles, to ensure safe approach and landing operations, including stabilized approach criteria and go-around policies.
- 1.3 This Aeronautical Information Circular (AIC) provides guidance to operators, flight crew, and air traffic service providers on stabilized approach criteria and best practices to reduce the risk of unstabilized approaches in Fiji. The material is aligned with internationally recognized safety principles and is intended to support operators in strengthening operational procedures, training, and safety management systems. This AIC is guidance and shall be read together with the applicable Acts, Air Navigation Regulations, Standards Documents, approved manuals and CAAF-issued approvals; it does not replace those instruments or operator-specific aircraft procedures.

SPECIAL BOXES: A stabilized approach is a prerequisite for landing. Continuation of an unstable approach is not acceptable. Except where an approved procedure specifically provides otherwise, an approach not stabilized at or below the applicable gate requires a go-around.

2. APPLICABILITY

- 2.1 This AIC applies to:
 - a) Fiji AOC holders and foreign operators conducting flights within, to, from, or over Fiji and general aviation where applicable;
 - b) Flight crew members engaged in approach and landing operations;
 - c) Air Traffic Service Providers, where applicable to approach management.

3.0. STABILIZED APPROACH CONCEPT

- 3.1 A stabilized approach is achieved when the aircraft maintains a steady and controlled descent profile, meeting all prescribed criteria as defined in the operators approved or accepted operations manual/SOP for the aircraft type and operations by defined altitude (stabilization height) and remaining within acceptable limits thereafter.

3.2 The recommended minimum stabilization heights are (or higher minima established by the operator, manufacturer, CAAF approval, special authorization or approach procedure are:

- a) 1,000 ft above aerodrome elevation in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC);
- b) 500 ft above aerodrome elevation in visual meteorological conditions (VMC).

3.3 Below the applicable stabilization gate, any exceedance of the operators stabilized approach criteria shall require a go around ,unless specifically permitted by the approved SOP and immediately corrected within defined limits.

4.0 STABILIZED APPROACH CRITERIA

4.1 An approach is considered stabilized when all of the following conditions are met unless otherwise specified in the AFM, manufacturer guidance, approved operations manual or CAAF -approved procedure for:

- a) Aircraft is on the correct flight path;
- b) Only small corrections in heading and pitch are required;
- c) Airspeed is within acceptable limits (typically between VREF and VREF + 20 knots);
- d) Aircraft is in the correct landing configuration;
- e) Descent rate is not excessive (normally $\leq 1,000$ ft per minute unless briefed);
- f) Power setting is appropriate for the configuration;
- g) Required briefings and checklists are completed;
- h) Navigation guidance (e.g., ILS/localizer/glideslope) is within limits where applicable.

5.0. UNSTABILIZED APPROACH

5.1. Unstabilized approaches have been identified internationally as a significant contributor to approach and landing accidents.

5.2. Common contributing factors include:

- Excessive speed or altitude (high-energy approach);
- Insufficient planning or rushed approach;
- Adverse weather conditions;
- ATC constraints leading to late descent or configuration;
- High crew workload or fatigue;
- Poor energy management or automation handling.

5.3. Unstabilized approaches events must be captured, analysed and trended through the operators safety management system (SMS) and occurrence reporting process.

6.0. GO AROUND POLICY

- 6.1 Operators shall establish and enforce a strict go-around policy documented in the operations manual and standard operating procedures and supported by recurrent training, checking, and a non-punitive safety culture that supports prudent go-around decisions..
- 6.2 A go-around must be initiated immediately if:
- a) The aircraft is not stabilized at the defined stabilization height; or
 - b) The approach becomes unstable at any point below the stabilization height.
- 6.3 Flight crew shall not be subject to adverse action for a safety-justified go-around conducted in accordance with SOPs.
- 6.4. A stabilized approach is a prerequisite for landing. Continuation of an unstable approach is not acceptable.

7.0 SAFETY BENEFITS OF STABILIZED APPROACH

- 7.1 Maintaining a stabilized approach provides the following safety benefits:
- Enhanced situational awareness;
 - Improved control of aircraft energy state (speed, configuration, descent);
 - Increased monitoring effectiveness by both pilots;
 - Reduced workload during critical flight phases;
 - Improved landing performance consistency;
 - Increased safety margins for decision-making, including go-arounds.
 - These benefits should be linked to operator safety performance monitoring and flight data monitoring (FDM) trend analysis.

8.0. OPERATORS RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.1 Operators shall:
- Incorporate stabilized approach criteria into SOPs;
 - Provide training on approach stabilization and go-around decision-making;
 - Monitor compliance through safety oversight and flight data monitoring (FDM) programmes;
 - Include unstable approach events within their Safety Management System (SMS);
 - Promote a safety culture that supports timely go-around decisions.
 - Maintain documented implementation evidence, including SOP amendments, training records, FDM/SMS trend monitoring, occurrence reporting where reportable, corrective action tracking and internal audit review.

9.0 ATC CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 Air Traffic Control (ATC) plays a critical role in supporting flight crews in achieving and maintaining a stabilized approach.
Controllers should, to the extent practicable, provide clearances that facilitate continuous descent operations and allow sufficient distance, time, and flexibility for

aircraft to meet stabilized approach criteria. This includes avoiding excessive speed assignments, late runway changes, or high-energy vectoring that may compromise a flight crew's ability to properly configure the aircraft and stabilize the approach profile in a timely manner.

Approach stability is fundamentally dependent on effective aircraft energy management. ATC support does not relieve the pilot-in-command or operator of responsibility to comply with approved SOPs and to initiate a go-around when required.

- 9.2 Controllers should maintain situational awareness of aircraft performance limitations and operational constraints, particularly in high traffic or adverse weather conditions. When issuing instructions that may affect approach stability, such as tight turns, short approaches, or altitude restrictions, ATC should consider the potential impact on flight crew workload and energy management.

Effective coordination, timely sequencing, and the provision of predictable approach paths will enhance safety and reduce the likelihood of unstable approaches, thereby supporting safe and efficient landing operations, subject to separation standards, traffic management requirements and operational safety priorities.

- 9.3 The following critical elements must be considered by ATC to ensure support for a stabilized approach:

- Approach safety = energy management (speed + altitude)
- Aircraft require sufficient distance (track miles) to descend and decelerate
- Shortcuts can make aircraft high on profile leading to unstable approach
- ATC must provide early and accurate distance-to-touchdown information
- Speed restrictions can prevent proper descent and increase workload
- Late runway change can directly cause unstable approaches
- Tight/short vectoring can cause aircraft to intercept glide slope from above causing high descent rates
- Pilots should advise ATC when unable to comply with a clearance while maintaining stabilized approach criteria.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The prevention of unstabilized approaches requires a proactive and disciplined operational approach, supported by clear procedures, effective training, and strong safety culture.
- 10.2 Stabilized approach criteria must be strictly observed, and go-around decisions must be made without hesitation when safety margins are not assured.
- 10.3 Operators and ATS providers should review applicable manuals, procedures and training material against this guidance within a defined timeframe or at the next scheduled amendment cycle.