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*International Civil Aviation Organization***Ninth Meeting of the Aerodromes Operations and Planning Sub-Group (AOP/SG/9)***Bangkok, Thailand, 30 June to 4 July 2025***Agenda Item 4: Provision of AOP in the Asia/Pacific Region****MALDIVES' ICAO USOAP CMA AUDIT EXPERIENCE - FROM PLANNING TO LESSONS LEARNED**

(Presented by Maldives)

SUMMARY

This Information Paper presents the Maldives' experience in preparing for the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme – Continuous Monitoring Approach (USOAP CMA). It highlights the key phases of planning, coordination, and execution, while outlining the proactive strategies adopted by the State to ensure audit readiness.

The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the preparatory measures undertaken, including gap analyses, internal audits, inter-agency coordination, and capacity-building initiatives.

This paper underscores the critical importance of early planning, comprehensive team preparedness, robust data validation, and a commitment to continuous improvement. The insights shared are intended to support other States in strengthening their readiness for ICAO audits.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 From 11 to 23 June 2025, the Maldives underwent a full-scope audit under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme – Continuous Monitoring Approach (USOAP CMA). The audit assessed the State's capabilities in effectively implementing safety oversight across all eight critical elements (CEs) of a civil aviation system, as defined by ICAO.

1.2 While the audit covered all technical areas, this paper focuses on the Aerodromes and Ground Aids (AGA) area, where the Maldives achieved a preliminary score of 89.43% —a significant result that reflects the country's commitment to maintaining safe and compliant aerodrome operations. The Maldives also recorded a preliminary overall score of 79.85%.

1.3 This paper outlines the planning and preparation efforts undertaken by the Maldives Civil Aviation Authority (MCAA) and its stakeholders, with particular attention to the measures implemented to ensure compliance in the AGA domain. It further discusses the key challenges faced during the audit, the coordination mechanisms employed, and the lessons learned—with the aim of supporting continuous improvement within the Maldives' aviation oversight framework and offering insights for other States preparing for full-scope USOAP CMA audit.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The ICAO USOAP CMA audit conducted in the Maldives was a full-scope audit covering all eight technical areas: LEG (Primary Aviation Legislation), ORG (Civil Aviation Organization), PEL (Personnel Licensing), OPS (Aircraft Operations), AIR (Airworthiness), AIG (Accident and Incident Investigation), ANS (Air Navigation Services), and AGA (Aerodromes and Ground Aids).

2.2 Preparations for the audit commenced well in advance and included several coordinated efforts aimed at strengthening the State's readiness:

- Technical Assistance and Engagements: The Maldives actively engaged with ICAO COSCAP-SA and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) through technical assistance missions to better understand audit expectations and global best practices.
- National Coordination: A dedicated national coordination team was established, comprising representatives from the Civil Aviation Authority and key industry stakeholders, including aerodrome operators.
- Completion of ICAO Tools: The State completed the Self-Assessment and Activity Questionnaire (SAAQ) and updated Protocol Questions (PQs) in the ICAO Online Framework (OLF), supported by clear and verifiable evidence.
- Mock Audits and Internal Evaluations: Internal audits, gap analyses, and industry-wide audit awareness programs were conducted. These efforts ensured alignment between regulatory requirements and operational practices.
- Evidence Management: Particular attention was given to organizing documentation and making audit evidence readily accessible, both digitally and physically, in order to ensure traceability and responsiveness during the audit process.

2.3 As part of the audit process, Velana International Airport (VIA) was selected for the ICAO team's industry visit verification in the AGA area. Key focus areas during the visit included:

- Rescue and Firefighting Services (RFF): The audit team reviewed firefighter qualifications, recurrent training, OJT records, and participation in emergency drills. Physical inspections were conducted on equipment and vehicles, including reaction tests and the use of protective gear. Relevant documentation, such as training rosters, task resource analyses, and equipment readiness logs, was reviewed for accuracy and currency.
- Airport Emergency Planning (AEP): Records of full-scale emergency drills, after-action reports, and supporting documents were examined. The audit emphasized the need for structured filing systems and easy retrieval of annual exercise records.
- Airfield Ground Lighting (AGL): Auditors assessed maintenance procedures, fault rectification logs, testing frequencies, and conducted interviews with responsible personnel to evaluate operational knowledge and oversight.
- Taxiway C Construction and Worksite Safety: The audit included an on-site inspection of construction activities and safety procedures for work-in-progress areas, with a specific focus on compliance with work safety protocols during the Taxiway C development.

2.4 One of the critical aspects observed during the audit was the fast-paced nature of the industry visit. These visits require a high level of readiness and clear coordination between all involved parties. Based on this experience, the following key practices are recommended for States undergoing similar audits:

- Be Prepared for a Fast-Paced Environment: Site visits proceed quickly and require staff to be well-informed and ready to provide timely responses and documentation.
- Make Evidence Easily Accessible: Supporting documents should be clearly labeled, structured, and readily available for review to facilitate efficient verification by auditors.
- Ensure Stakeholder Awareness: All relevant entities, including operators and contractors, must be briefed on the audit schedule, scope, and expected conduct during the visit.
- Maintain Up-to-Date Records: Operational and maintenance records must be current and accurate at the time of the audit. Outdated documentation, even if performance is satisfactory, can lead to findings.
- Exhibit Professionalism and Confidence: Calm, confident, and well-prepared staff enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the audit process.

2.5 Key Lessons Learned from the Audit Preparation Include:

- Strategic and Early Planning: Starting preparations well ahead of the audit and forming a dedicated coordination team proved vital.
- Effective PQ Handling: Each Protocol Question must be supported by legal references, documented procedures, inspector tools, and actual implementation evidence.
- Comprehensive Evidence Management: Evidence must be uploaded to the OLF and also maintained on-site. Demonstrating consistent application across multiple examples strengthens compliance credibility.
- Value of Mock Audits: Internal audits using ICAO PQs helped identify gaps in documentation structure, implementation traceability, and oversight consistency.
- Regulatory Alignment: National regulations must clearly align with ICAO Annex provisions. Particular attention was given by auditors to the traceability of checklists and the effectiveness of oversight practices.
- Industry Collaboration: Frequent engagement with aerodrome operators helped align audit expectations, improve document preparation, and foster collective accountability for audit success.

2.6 Conclusion

2.6.1 The Maldives' successful performance in the ICAO USOAP CMA audit reflects a methodical and integrated approach to audit preparedness. Key contributors to this success included the formation of a dedicated multi-stakeholder coordination team, systematic updating of national regulations to fully align with ICAO provisions, and proactive engagement with aerodrome operators and industry partners.

2.6.2 By implementing thorough gap analyses, conducting mock audits, and maintaining meticulous evidence management, the Maldives was able to identify and address compliance issues well before the audit. This proactive and collaborative strategy was pivotal in achieving a high preliminary score in the AGA area and sets a practical example for other States preparing for similar audits.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to take note of the contents of this Information Paper, as they may assist the State in preparing for any future USOAP audits, and to discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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