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*International Civil Aviation Organization*The Seventh Meeting of the Asia/Pacific
Aerodrome Assistance Working Group (AP-AA/WG/7)*Bangkok, Thailand, 27 to 30 May 2025***Agenda Item 4: Runway Safety and GRF Implementation****VELANA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (VIA) / RUNWAY SAFETY TEAM (RST) ISSUES
WITH EMPHASIS ON SEAPLANE OPERATIONS**

(Presented by Maldives)

SUMMARY

This paper presents the current practices at Velana International Airport in managing water runway issues. The Airport operates both a land aerodrome and a co-located water aerodrome, both of which are managed by Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL).

Given that the water aerodrome at VIA serves as a primary hub for seaplane operations in the Maldives, the potential for runway safety issues is significant. To effectively address these issues, MACL has integrated water runway safety issues into the mandates of the existing Local Runway Safety Team (LRST) established for the land aerodrome.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Velana International Airport, in the Republic of Maldives, serves as a critical aviation gateway to the nation, uniquely operating both a land aerodrome and a co-located water aerodrome on Hulhule' Island. This dual operational capability, managed by Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL), is necessary to the nation's tourism and connectivity, particularly given the Maldives' geographical location in the Indian Ocean and archipelago of atolls spanning 823km by 130km, over 99% of which consists of the Sea.

1.2 The water aerodrome at VIA functions as a pivotal hub for seaplane operations, facilitating crucial inter-island transportation and resort access. However, the operation of a water aerodrome, particularly in conjunction with a land aerodrome, introduces a complex set of safety considerations. Hence, robust safety management strategies are necessary. Recognizing the significant volume of seaplane movements and potential for associated safety issues, MACL has incorporated the water runway safety issues into the existing Local Runway Safety Team (LRST) implemented for the land aerodrome.

1.3 Specifically, during the 1st LRST meeting of 2022, a formal decision was made, with the unanimous vote of all members present, to integrate water runway safety issues into the existing LRST framework. This decision was prompted by the escalating frequency of water runway safety issues raised in previous LRST meetings. Consequently, to ensure a comprehensive representation and expertise, the LRST membership was expanded to include personnel directly involved in water aerodrome operations and maintenance, encompassing seaplane operations, and air traffic service providers.

1.4 This integration aims to create a comprehensive and unified approach to address runway safety issues, ensuring the seamless and secure operation of both land and water aerodrome facilities. The discussion details the current practices by MACL in managing water runway safety within LRST framework, highlighting specific issues and mitigation measures implemented.

2. DISCUSSION

LRST FOR WATER RUNWAYS

2.1 The LRS Team for the Velana International Airport (VIA) land aerodrome is composed of representatives from various key stakeholders, including:

- Aerodrome operators,
- Maintenance personnel,
- Wildlife hazard management,
- Air Traffic Service providers,
- The Air Traffic Controllers association, and
- Airline operators.
- Additionally, the Safety Compliance Manager of VIA and
- A representative from the regulatory body (Maldives Civil Aviation Authority) participates as observers.

2.2 Following the decision to incorporate water runway safety matters into the LRST's framework, the team's membership was expanded to include representatives from water aerodrome operators and seaplane operators. Notably, the wildlife hazard management, maintenance, air traffic service provider, and air traffic controllers' association maintain consistent representation across both land and water aerodrome safety discussions. This continuity is facilitated by the co-location of the aerodromes and their unified management under MACL.

2.3 The LRST has addressed a range of safety issues, such as:

- Successful installation of water runway threshold identification buoys.
- A proposal to realign the North-Left (NL) water runway was also raised, leading to thorough discussion and assessment conducted in accordance with the Safety Risk Assessment (SRA) procedure established under the Safety Management System (SMS) of VIA.
- A unique challenge arose concerning the presence of marine animals, specifically sharks, near the water runway. This issue, attributed to local feeding practices due to the aerodrome's proximity to residential areas, posed a risk to marine rescue personnel. It was resolved through the relocation of local feeding sites.

2.4 Furthermore, to address the identified issue on water runway layout confusion for the marine personnel, familiarization trainings were conducted to marine rescue team. Additionally, a concern regarding water runway access by third parties was raised. Consequently, a proposal was made to document a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to implement immediate safety measures and to prepare for the water aerodrome certification requirements to be outlined in the forthcoming water aerodrome regulations by the MCAA.

2.5 It is important to note that, as of now, the Maldives Civil Aviation Authority (MCAA) promulgated its initial Issue of the Water Aerodrome Regulation, MCAR 138A, on 20th January 2025, with an effective date of 1st May 2025. Certification requirements for water aerodromes, under these regulations, are applicable to Visual Flight Rules (VFR) operations and are mandatory under the following circumstances: when the water aerodrome is co-located with a land aerodrome, when the water aerodrome exceeds 100,000 annual movements, or when the MCAA deems certification necessary.

2.6 Concurrently, the MCAA has also published the Water Aerodrome Standards, MCAR 138B. Consequently, as the operator of the water aerodrome at Velana International Airport, MACL has initiated the formation of a Task Force for the water aerodrome certification process comprising all relevant personnel directly involved in the operation and maintenance of the aerodrome, seaplane operators, security agencies, the air traffic service providers and the aeronautical information services provider of the Maldives.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to note the information contained in this paper.

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