

**61ST CONFERENCE OF
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION**

*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
7 – 11 September 2026*

AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY

**STRENGTHENING AERODROME EMERGENCY RESPONSE
THROUGH PREPARATION AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

(Presented by Hong Kong, China)

INFORMATION PAPER

SUMMARY

This paper shares the experience from Hong Kong, China in the expeditious management of an aircraft accident at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) in 2025. It presents the professional execution of HKIA's emergency response procedures under challenging conditions and the swift salvage of the wreckage of a Boeing B747-400 freighter from marine waters adjacent to the North Runway. The rapid full restoration of airport operations within seven days was achieved through the synergy between HKIA's robust aerodrome emergency planning and preparedness, and the strong regional cooperation that enabled the prompt deployment of specialised salvage resources.

STRENGTHENING AERODROME EMERGENCY RESPONSE THROUGH PREPARATION AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 20 October 2025, a Boeing B747-400 freighter veered off the runway after landing at the North Runway of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and came to rest partially submerged in the adjacent sea. HKIA's emergency response procedures were activated immediately, with all relevant agencies, including Civil Aviation Department of Hong Kong (HKCAD), Hong Kong Fire Services Department (HKFSD), Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK), Hong Kong Police Force and Air Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA), implementing established protocols for rescue and command in a coordinated manner. The subsequent removal of the wreckage from the marine waters adjacent to the North Runway was beyond routine aerodrome emergency response capability, necessitating specialised heavy-lifting vessels and a professional team from the Guangzhou Salvage Bureau under the Rescue and Salvage Bureau of the Ministry of Transport of the People's Republic of China (CRS). The salvage operation was completed within seven days, while normal operations were maintained on the Centre and South Runways in parallel to the salvage operation, minimising disruption to this major international aviation hub.

1.2 Building on DGCA/60 Action Item 60/19, which emphasised the importance of contingency planning and regional cooperation, this paper shares the experience of Hong Kong, China in the seamless implementation of aerodrome emergency response, expeditious completion of the challenging salvage operation and full restoration of airport operations. It demonstrates that effective aerodrome emergency response relies on both robust emergency planning and preparedness, as well as strong regional cooperation in specialised operations for accident scenarios beyond routine response capability.

2. DISCUSSION

Seamless Implementation of Emergency Response

2.1 The HKCAD implements a rigorous regulatory regime for aerodrome licensing in accordance with ICAO Annex 14. As the aerodrome operator of HKIA, AAHK is required to maintain a comprehensive emergency planning framework, covering emergency response procedures with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as the coordination and review mechanism among involved stakeholders. Effectiveness of the framework is ensured through regular exercises and drills involving relevant responding agencies. These exercises covered a wide spectrum of scenarios, from general adverse weather events to dedicated sea rescue operations, thereby ensuring readiness for various emergencies.

2.2 Subsequent to the aircraft accident on 20 October 2025, HKIA's emergency response procedures were professionally executed despite under challenging night-time and strong monsoon conditions. The HKFSD conducted an immediate search and rescue operation involving 280 personnel and over 80 appliances, vessels and ambulances. The AAHK activated the Airport Emergency Centre to facilitate unified command among multiple agencies, enabling seamless coordination. Concurrently, the HKCAD and AAHK closely coordinated to ensure safe operations on the South and Centre Runways were maintained, minimising traffic disruption. After the AAIA's initial investigation and evidence collection, AAHK conducted urgent repairs of essential facilities, restoring the North Runway in the afternoon of 21 October 2025 and putting it on standby for subsequent aircraft wreckage removal.

The Challenge: Removal of Aircraft Wreckage from Marine Water

2.3 In terms of capability for disabled aircraft removal, HKIA maintains specialised aircraft recovery equipment on-site, including recovery airbags, lifting jacks and de-bogging kits, capable of handling up to Code F aircraft. Adequate engineering staff from AAHK, maintenance organisations and home-based air operators are proficient to operate the equipment through regular training. With the

expertise and ready-to-deploy equipment, HKIA had effectively managed various on-aerodrome recovery scenarios in the past, such as runway excursion and landing gear failures, demonstrating a high level of operational preparedness.

2.4 While HKIA is prepared and well versed in handling on-aerodrome recovery operations, the wreckage removal of a destroyed Boeing B747-400 from marine waters adjacent to the North Runway presented a different order of challenge. Salvage of aircraft wreckage required specialised heavy-lifting vessels, underwater survey equipment, and highly skilled diving teams, which are beyond the capacity of typical aerodrome resources. This underscored the critical necessity of cooperating with external specialised service providers.

2.5 Recognising the need for collaboration to address scenarios which may require specialised capabilities, the HKCAD and the CRS have maintained a cooperation framework since 2016, which was expanded in 2024 into the “Tripartite Agreement on Search and Rescue and Salvage of Crashed Aircraft” with the inclusion of the AAIA. The Agreement fostered cooperation and enhanced communication and technical information exchange among the parties. Leveraging the operational rapport and mutual understanding cultivated through this long-standing arrangement, HKCAD facilitated a direct connection between the AAHK and the Guangzhou Salvage Bureau under CRS. With the communication established, AAHK promptly engaged the Guangzhou Salvage Bureau to undertake the salvage operation after the aircraft accident. The Guangzhou Salvage Bureau swiftly assessed the scenario and mobilised salvage vessels and equipment, with combined lifting capacity up to 850 tonnes, along with a professional team comprising about 80 engineers, divers and boatmen.

The Synergy: Aerodrome Emergency Response Framework and Regional Cooperation

2.6 The rapid deployment of salvage expertise and resources from the external source brought valuable support, and the clear communication and accountability established among the airport community were essential to the salvage operation. To manage the complexity of the operation and ensure effective coordination across multiple agencies, an Aircraft Recovery Committee was established by AAHK in accordance with HKIA’s emergency procedures. This committee brought together key stakeholders, including AAHK, HKCAD, AAIA, airline representative and the salvage team, serving as a central platform for integrated planning, expedited decision-making, and resolution of technical challenges. The committee also coordinated across relevant government agencies to streamline the processing of necessary permissions and approvals, including those for the cross-boundary transit of vessels and crew, permits for vessels entering the airport approach areas, and temporary exemptions from airport height restrictions for tall vessels deployed.

2.7 The collaborative synergy enabled the salvage team to commence underwater survey within three days of the accident and was instrumental in the subsequent recovery of the scattered aircraft fuselage, tail section, engines and other critical components from the marine waters. The expeditious completion of the salvage operation allowed the North Runway to reopen and enabled HKIA to resume full operations within seven days of the accident. The experience illustrated how a robust aerodrome emergency framework, reinforced by effective regional cooperation, can streamline coordination among multiple agencies and strengthen aerodrome emergency response capability.

3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) note the experience shared by Hong Kong, China in HKIA’s emergency response as a demonstration of robust aerodrome emergency preparedness and regional collaboration;
- b) encourage States/Administrations to share their relevant experiences in aerodrome emergency preparedness and response; and
- c) encourage States/Administrations to recognise the importance of regional

cooperation in emergency response and to establish cooperation frameworks to facilitate effective coordination.

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