



International Civil Aviation Organization

ICAO The Fifth Meeting of the South Asia, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia ATM Coordination Group (SAIOSEACG/5)

Bangkok, Thailand, 13 – 16 January 2026

Agenda Item 2: Review Outcomes of Related Meetings

SOUTH CHINA SEA TRAFFIC FLOW REVIEW GROUP MEETING OUTCOMES

(Presented by the Secretariat)

SUMMARY

This paper presents the key outcomes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the South China Sea Traffic Flow Review Group (SCSTFRG/13) for the review and action by SAIOSEACG.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Regional airspace over the South China Sea has been moving into a new phase that is tighter separations, smarter procedures, better CNS infrastructure, and clear timelines for implementation. ICAO wishes to briefly share the current situation of SCS area overall.

1.2 The South China Sea Traffic Flow Review Group (SCSTFRG) was established by SEACG to analyse the traffic flow in the overall South China Sea airspace, ATS routes and the suitability of the flight level allocation scheme (FLAS) and flight level orientation scheme (FLOS) to optimize airspace capacity and enhance flight safety in the long term.

2.1 The Thirteenth Meeting of the South China Sea Traffic Flow Review Group (SCSTFRG/13) was held at Beijing China, from 16 to 18 July 2025. The meeting was attended 45 participants from Cambodia, China, Hong Kong China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, IATA, ICCAIA, ICAO and online participants from Pakistan and IFATCA. The relevant presentations and papers are available at: <https://www.icao.int/APAC/meetingdocs?fid=574#block-icao-page-title>.

2. DISCUSSION

2.2 The SCSTFRG/13 meeting confirmed that States in the South China Sea region are moving decisively toward tighter longitudinal separation and higher route capacity on key trunk routes. Trials of 20 NM spacing on L642 and M771 showed clear benefits, including shorter delays and no negative safety findings, leading the group to endorse full 20 NM implementation and the use of 30 NM during Large-Scale Weather Deviation (LSWD) events where surveillance allows.

2.3 Parallel work on A1 and A202 responded to rapidly growing traffic, with States agreeing to reduce spacing to at least 20 NM (with planning for 10 NM) and to implement parallel uni-directional routes, with a tentative trial start around 2027. Progress was also reported on 30 NM or improved spacing on routes such as A461, A583, M501, links between Manila and Ujung Pandang FIRs, and planned enhancements on N892, L625, M646, and A341, all aligned with the global “Project 30/10” objectives.

2.4 At the same time, the meeting recognized that modern traffic levels and upgraded CNS capabilities require a fundamental update of legacy concepts such as LSWD procedures and the Flight Level Allocation Schemes / Flight Level Orientation Schemes (FLAS/FLOS).

2.5 Existing LSWD rules, designed in 2002, were seen as overly restrictive and delay-prone, prompting support for using 30 NM separation during weather deviation, better cross-FIR coordination, and the use of advanced tools like AI-supported hazardous weather services and real-time turbulence data.

2.6 ICAO presented a six-phase roadmap that links reduced longitudinal separation to progressive optimisation and, ultimately, potential removal of FLAS in the South China Sea, including reallocation of flight levels, dynamic FLAS use, transition back to standard FLOS, and long-term restructuring of the route network using RNAV/RNP and exploration of cross-border Free Route Airspace.

2.7 Looking ahead, the meeting highlighted a broader strategic shift toward more flexible and performance-based airspace management. Malaysia outlined a national Free Route Operation framework combining Flexible Use of Airspace, Direct Route Operation trials, preparation for User Preferred Routes, and support for regional FRA.

2.8 Indonesia, Lao PDR, and Mekong States reported steady progress on PBN-based ATS routes and new cross-border connections. Enabling CNS infrastructure—such as radar and ADS-B networks in Indonesia, space-based ADS-B in the Philippines, and performance-based communication/surveillance requirements on selected routes—was recognized as essential to safely supporting tighter separation and greater capacity.

2.9 Throughout, ICAO encouraged States to strengthen data sharing, harmonise inter-ATS procedures, make better use of AIDC, CPDLC and ATFM, and actively engage in upcoming activities such as the regional FRA implementation webinar, positioning SCSTFRG as a central platform for coordinated, step-by-step transformation of South China Sea airspace.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

.....