



International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

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(Information Paper)

English and Spanish only¹

FOURTEENTH AIR NAVIGATION CONFERENCE

Montréal, Canada, 26 August to 6 September 2024

- Agenda Item 1: Update on the ICAO 2023-2025 Business Plan and long-term strategic planning**
1.2: Strategic alignment of global plans for performance improvement

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE SUPPRESSION OF LARGE FIRES

(Presented by Colombia)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Large fires know no borders, so international cooperation is crucial to fighting them effectively. Over the years, various arrangements have been set in place to facilitate the exchange of information, resources and expertise between countries. The use of aircraft to extinguish large fires makes it possible to respond to these catastrophes more efficiently, safeguarding biodiversity and reducing fire damage. Not all Member States have the resources, however, to extinguish such fires, which makes it necessary to establish collaborative mechanisms to facilitate the international movement of such assistance.

We have the opportunity to devise a procedure for international cooperation in extinguishing large fires by air, which is based on existing regulations on search and rescue procedures and air transport facilitation standards.

Action: The Conference is invited to urge ICAO, in its Standards and Recommended Practices, to include provisions on international cooperation for large-scale aerial firefighting in order to provide Member States with a regulatory framework to facilitate the exchange and mobility of resources, information and experience in this field.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Around the world, there has been an increase in forest fires,² with more than 370 million hectares of land burning every year, affecting ecosystems of all kinds and generating more than 1.8 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases.³ Large fires are transnational in that their aftermath knows no borders;⁴ they have a devastating impact on the environment, biodiversity, human lives and infrastructure.⁵ In this situation, international cooperation mechanisms offer an effective means of combating these conflagrations.

¹ English and Spanish versions provided by Colombia.

² United Nations Environment Programme. "Spreading like wildfire. The rising threat of extraordinary landscape fires". 2022

³ <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/wildfires-increase-integrated-strategies-forests-climate-and-sustainability-are-ever-0>

⁴ https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Documents/EnvironmentalReports/2Q22/ENVReport2022_Art72.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

There are currently a large number of United Nations agencies and other international organizations that have set in place arrangements for international cooperation in disaster response, global fire monitoring and the use of aircraft to extinguish large-scale fires, such as the Global Fire Monitoring Centre and the International Fire Aviation Working Group on Fire Management, which is part of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

1.2 The use of aircraft to extinguish fires offers the possibility of dealing more effectively with disasters of this kind, in such a way as to safeguard the biodiversity of ecosystems and reduce the damage caused by these massive fires.⁶ It is necessary to devise standards that allow more flexibility in the mobility of aircraft, crews and other trained personnel and their entry into States where these disasters occur and where the support of other countries is needed for a timely and effective response. Through ICAO, it is possible to ensure the establishment of these international standards on international cooperation in extinguishing large fires, given that they need to be aligned with the certification requirements, methods and systems for enhancing operational safety in fighting fires.⁷ All the above is also of importance since one of the priorities of this organization is to set in place a governance structure, along with coordination and communication strategies for crisis preparedness and response.⁸

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 According to data collected by the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service of the European Union, in 2023, many regions experienced an increased number of forest fires. In the course of that year, those fires generated approximately 2 170 megatonnes of carbon emissions.⁹ In total, across the world, some 3.9 million square kilometres were burned during the 2023–2024 fire season.¹⁰ Depending on their size, the speed with which they spread and their proximity, large fires may have a serious impact on the environment, biodiversity, public and private property, and lead to loss of life. The World Health Organization notes that wildfire smoke is associated with premature deaths and can exacerbate diseases.¹¹ Large fires are challenges for aviation as they affect the safety of operations and the efficiency of the aviation system through the smoke and ash that they release. Accordingly, it is vital to take early detection and suppression measures for large fires to mitigate these impacts.

2.2 Protocols for response to large-scale fires make provision for the deployment of firefighting teams on the ground and in the air, while aircraft play a complementary role in controlling the escalation of fires.¹² Not all States, however, have aircraft with sufficient capacity to deal with such fires and it is therefore essential to set in place international cooperation arrangements that allow the mobility and entry of aircraft, crews and trained personnel to extinguish large-scale fires, bearing in mind the impact of such fires at the global level. To this end, ICAO has created a forum for dialogue on aerial firefighting, in which initiatives and practices relating to the use of aircraft in the control of forest fires are exchanged through the I4F initiative.¹³ Similarly, at the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly, the Russian Federation presented working paper A41-WP/172, in which it drew attention to the potential of international cooperation to enhance the efficiency of aerial firefighting through joint and coordinated action.

2.3 In order to set up an international cooperation mechanism for the response to large-scale fires, a regulatory and legal framework is required that will enable the mobilization of aircraft between

⁶ www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Documents/EnvironmentalReports/2022/ENVReport2022_Art72.pdf

⁷ https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Documents/EnvironmentalReports/2022/ENVReport2022_Art72.pdf

⁸ AN-Conf/14-WP/3 – Priority focus areas

⁹ <https://atmosphere.copernicus.eu/2023-year-intense-global-wildfire-activity>

¹⁰ Jones et al. State of Wildfires 2023–2024. Retrieved from: <https://essd.copernicus.org/preprints/essd-2024-218/essd-2024-218.pdf> p.25

¹¹ https://www.who.int/health-topics/wildfires#tab=tab_2

¹² <https://www.icao.int/Meetings/I4F/Pages/default.aspx>

¹³ https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Documents/EnvironmentalReports/2022/ENVReport2022_Art73.pdf

Member States in support of the suppression of large-scale fires, by ensuring greater flexibility in the granting of entry permits, in customs procedures, and also in operational procedures. Section 3.1.6 of Annex 12 — *Search and Rescue* contains a recommendation to Member States, suggesting that they authorize their emergency response centres to request from other rescue coordination centres such assistance, including aircraft, vessels, persons or equipment, as may be needed to respond to the emergency; grant all necessary permits for the entry of such aircraft, vessels, persons or equipment into their territory; and make the necessary arrangements with the appropriate customs, immigration or other authorities with a view to expediting the timely and effective entry of such support teams. A similar regulation may be envisaged to deal with large fires in those States that require the support of other Member States in extinguishing them. Similarly, consideration could be given to the practices and recommendations set out in Annex 9 — *Facilitation*, which urges Member States to adopt the necessary measures for the transit of aircraft to and from other States, so as to avoid unnecessary delays.

2.4 It is important to bear in mind that not all aircraft used for firefighting purposes are necessarily civilian: some may be State aircraft; hence the need to consider the possibility of granting the same expeditious treatment to these aircraft, taking into account the provisions of Article 3 c) of the Chicago Convention.¹⁴

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 In the light of the above, the Conference is invited to adopt the following recommendation:

Recommendation 1.2/x – International cooperation arrangements for the suppression of major fires

That ICAO incorporate in its Standards and Recommended Practices provisions on international cooperation for large-scale aerial firefighting in order to provide Member States with a regulatory framework to facilitate the exchange and mobility of resources, information and experience in this field.

— END —

¹⁴**Article 3, Civil and state aircraft, c)** “No state aircraft of a contracting State shall fly over the territory of another State or land thereon without authorization by special agreement or otherwise, and in accordance with the terms thereof.”