

Leaflet

“Compliance with Flight Altitudes”

ATCM Resolution 2 (2004) includes provisions on flight heights over the Antarctic area, i.e. on minimum vertical and horizontal separation distances between aircraft and concentration of birds.

Pursuant to Article 17 paragraph 1 no. 2 of the Act Implementing the Protocol of Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (AIEP)¹ of 4 October 1991 harmful interference with fauna and flora native to the Antarctic is prohibited. Harmful interference means “flying or landing helicopters or other aircraft in a manner that disturb concentrations of birds or seals”. Assets to be protected are concentrations of animals on-shore – especially concentrations of seals and penguins – as well as concentrations of seals and birds on sea or drift ice and concentrations of whales. Due to their extreme adaptedness to local and regional conditions, fauna and flora of the Antarctic are very sensitive to external disturbances. Such disturbances may hamper the breeding success of birds or harm plants for years.

The following **minimum separation distances** for aircraft operations close to concentrations of animals are to be observed. The separation distance should possibly be greater.

- Seal and bird concentrations are not to be over flown below 610 meters (~ 2,000 ft) above ground level. In case of dropping below this flight height, an application for a special permit has to be submitted to the German Federal Environment Agency. Such permit may only be granted for scientific purposes (Article 17 paragraph 2 sentence 2 nos. 1 to 3 AIEP).
- The above mentioned separation distances are also valid for flights over lakes.
- Landings of aircraft within a radius of 930 meters (~ 3,000 ft) of seal and bird concentrations are not allowed.
- Flying along the coastline necessitates a vertical separation distance of 610 metres (2,000 ft) and, where possible, a horizontal separation distance of 460 meters (~1,500 ft).
- For crossing a coastline, a horizontal separation distance of 610 meters (~ 2,000 ft) is to be observed. The crossing has to be as short as possible (at right angles to the coastline).
- If individuals or groups of whales are spotted, a minimum vertical and horizontal separation distance of 310 meters (~ 1,000 ft) should be observed.
- Aircraft operations should be delayed or cancelled if weather conditions are bad so that suggested minimum separation distances cannot be maintained.

¹ Act Implementing the Protocol of Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty of 4 October 1991 (Act Implementing the Environmental Protection Protocol) of 22 September 1994 (Federal Law Gazette. I p.2593), most recently amended by Article 69 of the ordinance of 31 October 2006 (Federal Law Gazette I p.2407)

Additionally, the following measures are to be observed:

- It is not allowed to fly over an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA). If, however, an ASPA shall be crossed, an application for a special permit has to be submitted to the German Federal Environment Agency (cf. Article 29 paragraph 2 AIEP).
- Where possible, direct flights across concentrations of animals are to be avoided. Where aircraft operations close to concentrations of animals should be necessary, the duration of flights should be the minimum necessary (however, flying speed should not be increased).
- Hovering flights or repeated flights across concentrations of animals are highly questionable and are therefore to be avoided.
- Where practical, landings near to concentrations of animals should be downwind or behind a physical barrier.
- Since concentrations of birds are frequently found in coastal areas and on nunataks, such regions should be approached very cautiously.
- Take offs or turning manoeuvres towards concentrations of birds or seals – even beyond the minimum separation distances – cause additional stress to the animals and should therefore be avoided.

Please be so kind as to consider not only the *“Antarctic Flight Information Manual”* (AFIM) on flight paths, flight heights of landings and take offs but also the regulations of the *“Wildlife Awareness Manual”*². It lists in maps and aerial pictures most of wildlife colonies known in the area of the Antarctic Peninsula as well as ASPAs and AS-MAs. Additionally, it shows all regions that are forbidden to be over flown.

² Polar Region Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK 2006; ISBN 0-9552205-0-5