GUIDANCE NOTE
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HELIPORTS ON LARGE YACHTS

To: OWNERS, BROKERS, LAWYERS, INSURANCE COMPANIES, CAPTAINS, SURVEYORS, MANAGERS, BUILDERS, DESIGNERS, RECOGNISED ORGANIZATIONS AND AVIATION INSPECTION BODIES.

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1. THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

1.1 Aviation Inspection Bodies (AIBs) are approved by the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), under the authority of the UK Department for Transport (DfT).

1.2 AIBs are authorised to conduct yacht heliport inspections and certification against the requirements of the REG Yacht Code (YC) Annex H – 'Helidecks'.

1.3 Annex H incorporates the requirements of SOLAS Ch II-2 Regulation 18 'Helicopter Facilities' and applies the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Annex 14 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation - Volume II – 'Heliports'.

1.4 Individual REG members recognise the MCA's approval of AIBs, and this forms the basis for their own service level agreements with the approved AIBs. The monitoring of their services is a collective REG activity, through AIB audits and witness inspections led by Cayman Registry.

1.5 A REG-AIB Technical Committee is held annually to discuss amendments to the REG YC Annex H, unified interpretations, unified recommendations, and updates to this guidance note. Cayman Registry chairs these meetings.

1.6 REG members have agreements with Classification Societies, referred to as Recognized Organizations (ROs). The ROs have authority to approve aspects of the yacht heliports which are relatively routine for them, such as shipboard heliport structural strength and fixed firefighting systems.

1.7 The full division of work between AIBs and ROs is as per the delegation matrix in **Annex 1** to this Guidance Note.

1.8 Any 'equivalent arrangements' to prescriptive requirements must include a robust technical justification which is supported by the AIB and/or RO, in order to receive Flag approval. The AIBs and ROs should not be involved in prescribing any mitigation measures, this is the responsibility of the builder/designer or operator, who should seek advice from an independent expert when necessary. Each REG Administration will have their own template for an 'equivalent arrangement application form'; the AIB or RO, as appropriate, will submit to Flag for approval. For Cayman Registry this is known as a 'Form 526' or a 'Form 526(O)' if there are operational mitigating measures.

1.9 For a newbuild project, the AIB will issue a 'Helideck Landing Area Technical Certificate (HLATC)' to the yacht builder when they are satisfied with the shipboard heliport's physical characteristics and associated hardware under their direct purview as well as the matters being dealt with by the RO.

1.10 The Owner/operator must then request an 'operational' initial inspection by the AIB to verify the safety management system (aviation part only), including the shipboard heliport operations manual and crew training. The AIB will then issue a 'Helideck Landing Area Certificate (HLAC)' which is valid for 5 years, subject to the certificate being endorsed following an annual inspection within the survey window (see section 5).

1.11 It should be understood that an HLAC is a Flag State (maritime) certification and not an aviation approval in its own right.

2. TERMINOLOGY

Shipboard Heliport, Helideck and Helicopter Landing Area/Platform

ICAO Annex 14, Volume II, defines a **Shipboard Heliport** as *'A heliport located on a ship that may be purpose-built or non-purpose-built*. *A purpose-built shipboard heliport is one designed specifically for helicopter operations. A non-purpose-built shipboard heliport is one that utilizes an area of the ship that is capable of supporting a helicopter but is not designed specifically for it.'*

ICAO Annex 14, Volume II, defines a **Helideck** as '*A heliport located on a fixed or floating offshore facility such as an exploration and/or production unit used for the exploitation of oil or gas'.*

Although not relevant to yachts, the IMO Code for the Construction and Equipment of Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODU Code) is consistent with the above, defining a **Helideck** as '*a purpose-built helicopter landing platform located on a MODU*'.

SOLAS CHII-2/3.26 defines a **Helideck** as '*a purpose-built helicopter landing area located on a ship including all structure, fire-fighting appliances and other equipment necessary for the safe operation of helicopters'.*

SOLAS ChII-2/3.57 defines a **Helicopter Landing Area** *as a 'An area on a ship designated for occasional or emergency landing of helicopters but not designed for routine helicopter operations'.*

REG YC Annex H currently states a '***Shipboard Heliport*** *or* ***Helicopter Landing Area*** *means a Helideck as defined in SOLAS II-2/3.26'*.

Considering the above definitions, this REG YC Annex H may have more correctly said a '***Shipboard Heliport*** *or* ***Helideck*** *means a purpose-built helicopter landing platform/area, as defined in ICAO Annex 14 Vol. II and SOLAS II-2/3.26'*. The terminology will be revisited by the REG-AIB Technical Committee.

'Touch and Go'

The term 'touch and go' has been coined for landings where the helicopter does not power down before taking off again, and often the perception is this operation requires a lower level of compliance with safety standards when it actually introduces additional hazards. Therefore, this is not a term recognised by large yacht aviation experts and regulators, even for private (i.e. non-commercial) use, and so its use should be avoided.

If helicopter operations are intended where the aircraft is not shut down fully and secured to the deck before embarking/disembarking passengers/cargo, then a full risk assessment shall be carried out and declared, which can then be assessed for inclusion in the heliport certification and operational limitations.

All shipboard heliports should have the ability to support the weight (including the maximum take-off mass) of any helicopter operating on it. Appropriate tie-down points be provided for securing the helicopter in the event that it remains onboard following an emergency. The impact on the vessel's stability must also be assessed.

3. SHIPBOARD HELIPORT DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

When designing a shipboard heliport, early advice should be sought from an independent expert (i.e. a qualified consultant with first-hand experience).

The defining question should not be about deck diameter or structure but operational intent. Before dimensions are fixed, the concept of how the helicopter will integrate with the yacht's program should be clearly discussed, ideally with the Owner directly involved.

Once operational intent is clear, an aircraft can be identified early on that genuinely supports it, which will help inform decisions on space, access/egress, re-fuelling systems and the need for a helicopter hanger. From there, alignment becomes a disciplined exercise in feasibility including an assessment of aerodynamic interaction with the vessel (e.g. wind turbulence from adjacent structures, hot air plumes from exhausts etc.) perhaps via computer fluid dynamics modelling. Airwake and exhaust interaction can quickly erode the theoretical capability of a perfectly sized deck.

Consideration should also be made of the longevity of helicopter types between the design phase of a project and the operational phase, to ensure the intended/most appropriate version is used for heliport calculations.

4. FIXED FIREFIGHTING SYSTEMS

The regulations permit either a manual (locally controlled) Fixed Foam Monitors (FFMs) or a Deck Integrated Firefighting System (DIFFS). Remotely controlled FFMs and DIFFS are preferred as they can both be activated quickly and crew can remain at a safe distance and focus on other aspects of emergency response.

5. PERIODIC INSPECTIONS OF A SHIPBOARD HELIPORT

The 5-year HLAC shall be harmonized with the Flag and Class renewal survey dates. Annual inspections are mandatory but may be held within +/- 3 months of the anniversary date . Renewal surveys must be held before the certificate expiry date.

The annual shipboard heliport inspections shall be held at the same time as the annual Flag and Class surveys, as some aspects cross over into each other's area of responsibility. The yacht should be fully operational, fire and safety equipment ready for use, and the vessel appropriately manned. Where this is not the case, inspection outcomes may be reasonably limited or deferred, reflecting the condition at the time of attendance.

Whenever practical, a simulated extended drill (i.e. helicopter crash drills/firefighting/abandon ship) drill is to be witnessed by the AIB and Flag surveyor.

6. SHIPBOARD HELIPORTS FOR PRIVATE USE

Although SOLAS (and hence the REG Yacht Code) does not regulate the use of a shipboard heliport on a pleasure yacht in private use, under a Cayman Registry's primary legislation the Owner still has an obligation *'to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the ship is operated in a safe manner'*. Other Flag States may have similar general obligations for all ships.

Therefore, wherever possible, compliance with the commercial standards is recommended not only to protect the Owner's family, friends and crew but also to limit liability.

As a minimum we would expect the following:-

- An aviation safety audit/capability review undertaken by a competent person
- A Shipboard Heliport Operations Manual, written bespoke for each vessel, to mitigate the specific hazards and risks of each shipboard heliport
- Shipboard heliport fire/rescue/safety equipment is available (as per REG YC Annex H)
- All crew involved in helicopter operations have been trained to a standard that is equivalent to the MCA Large Yacht Heli-Deck Safety Training Syllabus.

The yacht's insurer may also have a 'helicopter clause' and should be consulted in advance of conducting helicopter operations onboard.

7. THE USE OF eVTOLS AND VERTIPORTS

Currently the use of eVTOLs is not covered by the REG Yacht Code. Any proposal to use eVTOLs on yacht shipboard heliports would need to be treated as a novel concept and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

8. ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS

Accident Investigation Board Norway – Report SL 2019/01 – A helicopter crash when attempting to land on a private yacht

9. REG APPROVED AIBs

The following are the REG approved AIBs:-

- Helideck Certification Agency
- Safeguard Helidecks

10. CONTACTING US

Technical queries should be sent to technical@cishipping.com