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Safety recommendation: AIC 21-R03/20-2001

Addressed to: NiuSky Pacific Limited

Date Issued: 30 June 2021

Investigation link: AIC 20-2001

Action Status: Issued

Introduction

On 16 March 2020 at 03:43 UTC (13:43 local time), the Civil Aviation Safety Authority of PNG (CASA PNG) notified the PNG AIC via email of a serious incident which occurred on the same date, involving a Bombardier DHC-8-402 aircraft, registered VH-QOE, owned by Qantas Airways Limited and operated by Sunstate Airlines (QLD) Pty Ltd. The AIC immediately commenced an investigation, and the appointment of an Investigator-In-Charge (IIC) in accordance with PNG Legislation, Civil Aviation Act 2000(As Amended) and ICAO Annex 13 standards and dispatched a team of investigators to perform on-site activities.

Occurrence

On 16 March 2020, at about 11:29 local, the flight crew of a Bombardier DHC-8-402, registered VH-QOE, owned by Qantas Airways Ltd and operated by Sunstate Airlines (QLD) Pty Ltd enroute from Jacksons International Airport, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea to Cairns International Airport, Queensland, Australia on a scheduled passenger flight, declared a PAN as a result of an in-flight smoke/fumes event.

The flight crew identified an unusual smell entering the cockpit which intensified as the aircraft continued climbing. After passing 10,000 ft, the cabin crew confirmed that the unusual smell extended to the cabin. At 11:28:23 the flight crew commenced the QRH procedure for "*Smoke (Warning Light) or Fuselage Fire, Smoke or Fumes*" by actioning the *RECALL ACTION* items, donning their oxygen masks, and broadcasting a PAN, to then request ATC for a priority return to Port Moresby.

Moresby Radar instructed the crew to track to Jacksons International Airport and plan for an approach to land on runway 32R.

As soon as the aircraft was established on the approach at about 4,000 ft, the smoke alarm in the toilet activated. The crew continued the approach and requested for ARFF to be available upon landing. The control tower then notified the ARFF and a team was sent to a stand by position at taxiway Golf to assist the aircraft as necessary.

The aircraft landed at 11:47:08. After completing the landing roll, the flight crew called the cabin crew to check on the status of the smoke and condition of the passengers. The cabin crew confirmed that the smoke was still present in the cabin and passengers were having trouble breathing.

After exiting the runway, the flight crew stopped the aircraft and shut down the engines at taxiway Foxtrot. The cabin crew conducted a precautionary disembarkation with the assistance of ARFF who were accompanying the aircraft by then. Passengers were later transported to the airport terminal.

There were 12 persons on board the aircraft: 2 flight crew, 2 cabin crew and 8 passengers. No injuries were reported.

The fumes/smoke event occurred due to burning oil in the No.2 engine. The oil was found to have leaked from a fractured No.3 bearing carbon seal element.

Safety deficiency description

VH-QOE had declared a PAN and requested for *priority* return to the Jacksons International Airport. Moresby Radar contacted Jacksons Radar and advised them that VH-QOE had declared a PAN and was returning with reported fumes in the cabin. Jacksons Radar acknowledged. However, Jacksons Radar, relaying the message to Jacksons Tower, did not provide information about the PAN. Following the query from Jacksons Tower regarding more information about the emergency situation, Jacksons Radar did not provide the clarification requested.

Jacksons Radar asked if VH-QOE could accept a speed reduction to allow another aircraft, P2-ATF, about to join downwind, to approach ahead. The investigation determined that in the event of a potential conflict between aircraft, right of way should have been given to the emergency aircraft unless it was impracticable to do so. The investigation also determined that Jackson Radar did not aware of the priority return requested and ask VH-QOE to accept a speed reduction.

When the flight crew of the emergency aircraft, VH-QOE, insisted that they required priority due to smoke and fume, the Jacksons Radar advised them to stand by. The crew called back just under a minute later as they had not heard back from Jacksons Radar, and it was then that they received clearance to approach.

The fact that the Jacksons Radar was able to appropriately give way and have P2-ATF safely give way, following VH-QOE flight crew's counter-request (request to be number 1), showed that there were available options for ATC to initially allow VH-QOE to be given right of way to approach ahead of the other non-emergency traffic.

The investigation determined that the request for instead of requesting VH-QOE to accept a speed reduction request was not necessary or appropriate. This circumstance did not cause any delay or deviation to VH-QOE's flight path. The investigation recognises that any unnecessary distraction or diversion of attention has the potential to affect the ability of the flight crew to effectively manage time critical situations such as an urgency or emergency situations. Although it was to no significant detriment, the flight crew of VH-QOE had their attention diverted intermittently for a period of just under a minute during the approach, following Jacksons Radar's speed reduction request.

Recommendation number AIC 21-R03/20-2001 to NiuSky Pacific Limited

The PNG Accident Investigation Commission recommends that NiuSky Pacific Limited should ensure that effective and appropriate communication and coordination is maintained with aircraft in an emergency or urgency situation.

Action requested.

The PNG Accident Investigation Commission requests that NiuSky Pacific Limited, note recommendation *AIC 20-R03/20-2001* and provide a response to the AIC within 90 days, but no later than 28 September 2021, and explain including evidence about how NiuSky Pacific Limited has addressed the safety deficiency identified in the safety recommendation.



HUBERT H. NAMANI, LLB
Chief Commissioner

30 June 2021

NiuSky Pacific Limited response

On 02 September 2021, the NiuSky Pacific Limited informed PNG AIC in response to the safety recommendation that they would update refresher training to ensure that all Air Traffic Services operational staff fully understand the nature of these types of incidents to ensure that inappropriate questions are not asked to the crew of emergency aircraft in future.

PNG AIC assessment of NiuSky Pacific Limited response

The AIC acknowledges the NiuSky Pacific Limited response and planned action. The AIC has assessed the response and accepted the planned safety action as satisfactory. However, the AIC shall assess NiuSky Pacific Limited's implementation of the planned action to the safety recommendation and reassign the status of the recommendation as appropriate when sample of documentary evidence is provided to the PNG AIC.

The AIC has recorded the Status of the Recommendation: **MONITOR**



HUBERT H. NAMANI, LLB
Chief Commissioner

14 October 2021

NiuSky Pacific Limited response

On 02 September 2021, NiuSky Pacific Limited (NSPL) informed PNG AIC in response to *Safety Recommendation AIC 21-R03/20-2001* that they would update refresher training to ensure that all Air Traffic Services operational staff fully understand the nature of types of incidents detailed in the *Safety Recommendation* safety deficiencies to ensure that inappropriate questions are not asked to aircraft crews in an emergency.

PNG AIC assessment of NiuSky Pacific Limited response

The AIC acknowledges the NSPL's response and planned corrective action. The AIC has assessed NSPL's implementation of the planned corrective action to address the identified safety deficiencies as appropriate.

The AIC assigns the NSPL response as *Satisfactory Intent* rating.

The AIC has recorded the **Status of the Recommendation: CLOSED**



Capt. A Bouraga MBE
Chief Commissioner

22 March 2022