

1 **Introduction**

- 1.1 The Belfast Terminal Manoeuvring Area (BTMA) is a volume of airspace established around the two major Belfast airports, and is also where air routes converge in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 Airspace volumes can take several different forms, or 'classes'. These classes define the rules that apply within that volume. Airspace classes range from Class A (strongest restrictions) to Class G (fewest restrictions).
- 1.3 The consultation was about changing the airspace classification of the BTMA. For full details of the BTMA, the issue to be resolved, and the potential impacts, please see the consultation document, available at www.consultation.nats.co.uk.
- 1.4 This report summarises the feedback received by the NATS Airspace Consultation regarding the proposal to change the Belfast TMA Classification. It assumes familiarity with the consultation material.
- 1.5 Consultation started Friday 9th October 2015 & closed Monday 14th December, a period of nine weeks and two days.

2 **The proposed solution**

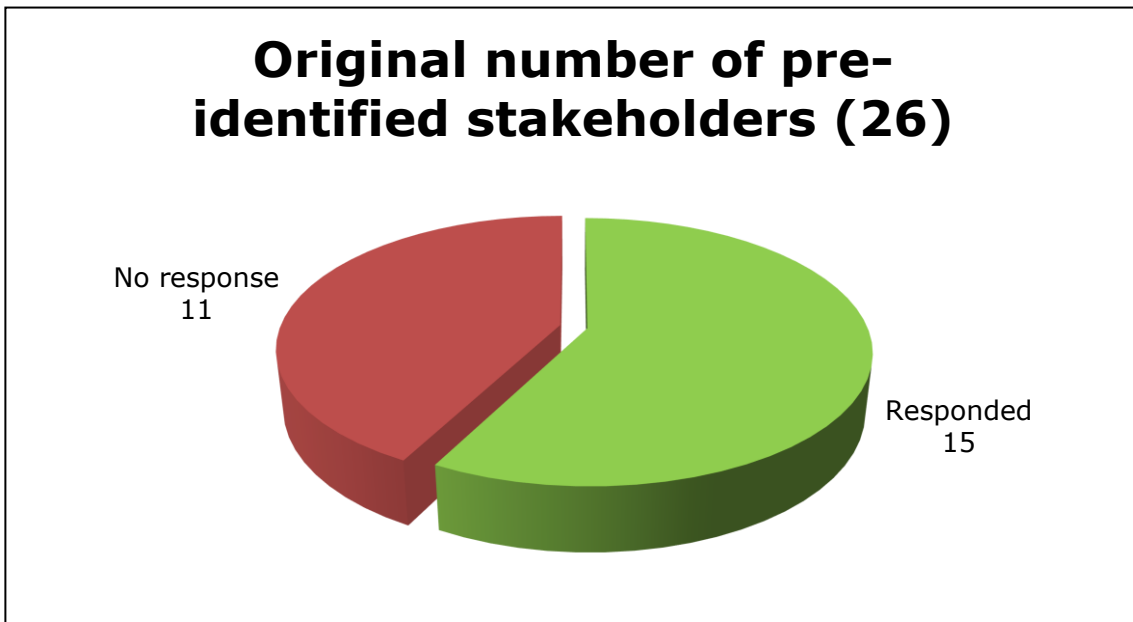
- 2.1 The preferred solution was to change both volumes of the BTMA from Class E to Class D, which supports VFR flight.
- 2.2 This would remove the need for a CAA exemption from the requirement for ATC to inform all flights when they cross internal BTMA boundaries between two classifications.
- 2.3 This would fulfil the objective, which in turn supports the justification.
- 2.4 Other solutions were considered and not progressed – see consultation document paras 5.2-5.4, and paras 5.21-5.23 later in this document.
- 2.5 The predicted impacts of the proposed solution were also detailed in the consultation document, Sections 6-10.

3 **Stakeholder engagement**

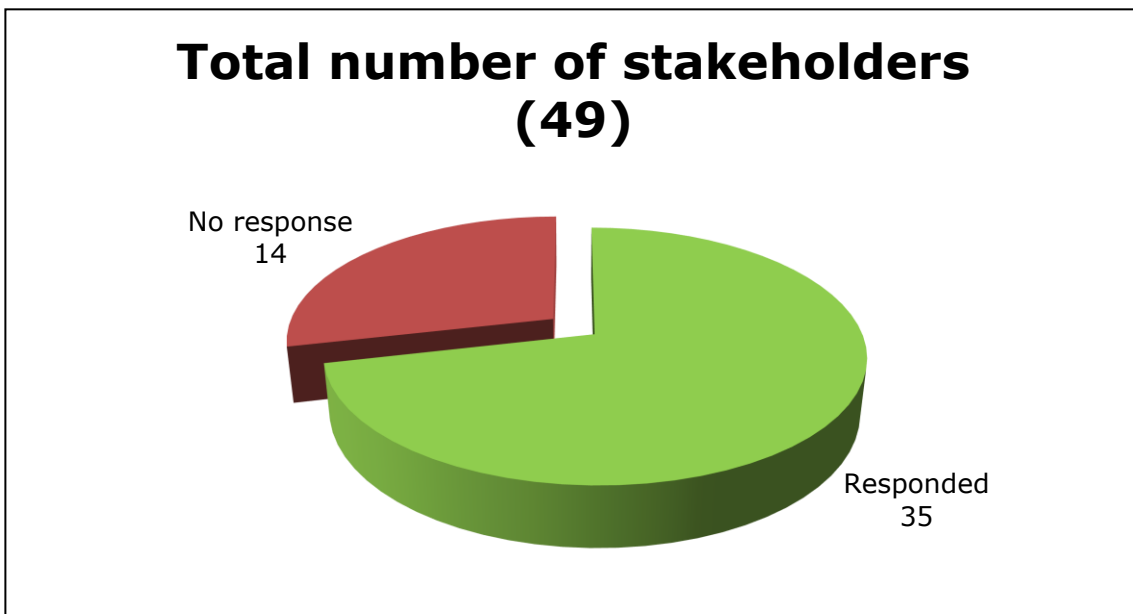
- 3.1 Eleven local and fifteen national aviation stakeholder organisations were identified in advance of the consultation launch.
- 3.2 The eleven local stakeholder organisations (defined here as Northern Ireland-based clubs/aerodromes/strips/aviation companies) were telephoned several weeks before consultation launched. The purpose of these calls was to give notice that the consultation was coming. During each of these calls we briefly described the proposal and discussed the impacts it may cause the stakeholder. We identified that those most likely to be affected would be non-RT VFR users.
- 3.3 A Pilot/ATC Forum was also held part way through the consultation period, on Thursday 5th November. Invitations to the forum were publicised with the consultation document. Representatives of both Belfast Aldergrove ATC and Belfast City ATC hosted the forum.
- 3.4 This forum was attended by 37 members of the Northern Ireland GA community from a wide cross-section of disciplines including fixed-wing, microlight, gyroplane, gliding, hang-gliding and paragliding.
- 3.5 The forum's Q&A session discussed the impacts this proposal may have, and also the technicalities of the airspace change process itself.
- 3.6 Some stakeholders subsequently established a direct dialogue regarding further questions and concerns about the impacts.
- 3.7 Separately, Belfast Aldergrove and Belfast City ATC management also engaged the aircraft operators which use their airports.

4 **Responses to the proposal**

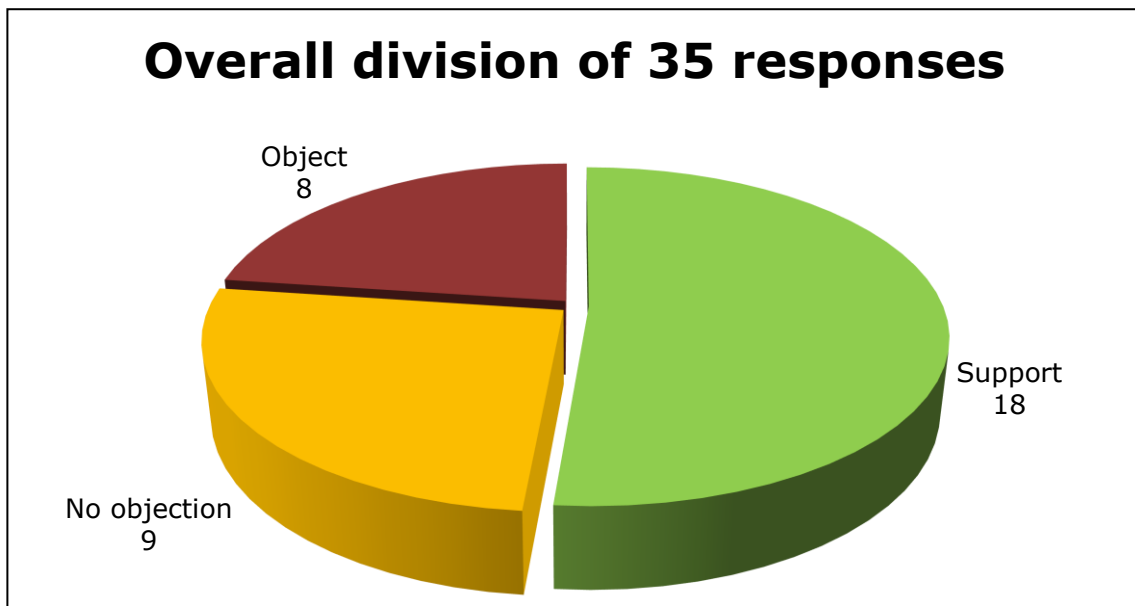
4.1 Of the **26** stakeholders originally identified (see Appendix C of the consultation document), **15** responded.



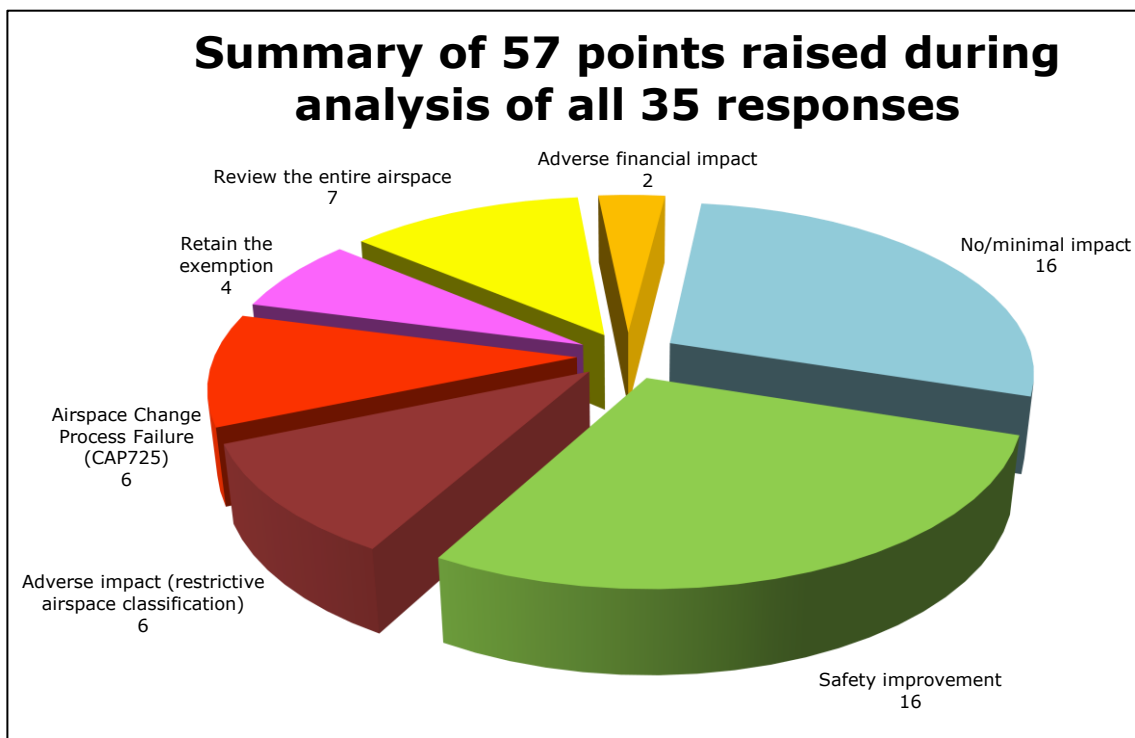
4.2 Additionally, **20** responses were received from 23 other stakeholders.



4.3 The **35** total responses were divided into three main categories.



4.4 The **35** responses were analysed for common themes. Seven theme categories emerged. Some responses contained comments fitting more than one theme category, for example a single response might say both 'this change would not make any difference to my operations' and 'it would result in a safety improvement for the BTMA'. In total, **57** points were raised.



4.5 See Section 9 Appendix A for details on how responses were categorised.

5 **Issues, Considerations, Mitigations**

- 5.1 Before consultation began, we anticipated that some stakeholders would be impacted sufficiently for their operation to be restricted. This was borne out by the information we received during the telephone calls made before consultation launched (see para 3.2).
- 5.2 In the consultation document, stakeholders with a particular interest in non-RT VFR flight were asked if they would like to be considered for a Letter of Agreement (LoA) with the ATC units, regarding non-RT VFR access to the proposed Class D BTMA.
- 5.3 The majority of comments received stated that the proposal would have no impact on operations, and/or that safety in the BTMA would be improved due to the fully-known airspace environment.
- 5.4 The following paragraphs discuss other themes raised during the consultation, with particular emphasis on local airspace users.

Adverse impact due to restrictive airspace classification: Ulster Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club (UHPC)

- 5.5 The governing body for hang gliding and paragliding in Northern Ireland, the UHPC, raised concerns about the impact this proposal would have on their activities, and requested to be considered for an LoA covering seven sites in the vicinity of the BTMA. The UHPC's members primarily fly VFR non-RT.
- 5.6 A meeting to discuss LoA arrangements has been set, between air traffic management at Belfast Aldergrove, Belfast City and UHPC's representatives. *Discussing an LoA in advance of a regulatory decision does not prejudice that decision.* These negotiations will discuss segregated area(s) of the BTMA that could be used VFR non-RT under certain specific conditions, allowing the organisation to continue to operate.
- 5.7 Two paragliding schools have also requested LoA consideration for the same sites, and will be contacted in due course.

Adverse impact due to restrictive airspace classification: Ulster Gliding Club (UGC)

- 5.8 Northern Ireland's only gliding club, the UGC, raised concerns about the potential impact this proposal may have on some of their cross-country activities. The UGC's members primarily fly VFR non-RT.
- 5.9 The UGC's responses indicate that many gliders are equipped with RT but only some glider pilots are licensed to use that RT for ATC purposes. They make the point that acquiring a crossing clearance from ATC may be possible (subject to equipage/licensing), but the problem would be complying with that clearance.
- 5.10 The UGC said that glider pilots – even RT licensed - would generally choose to route around Class D rather than acquire a clearance to cross. They said that a clearance to maintain an altitude or follow a set route within Class D would be difficult, because gliders must chase altitude-giving energy sources such as thermals, which move and would cause an unpredictable route. Gliders would

also find it challenging to hold station outside CAS awaiting clearance. They said that Class D is treated by glider pilots as a 'no entry' sign and their flights would add to congestion around the outside of the CAS volume.

- 5.11 The UGC's response also states that there is little glider traffic in the areas in question, and that there would be limited opportunities for flights through those areas. Based on this statement that few flights would be impacted, and that those few could potentially use the RT, NATS contends that the specific impact on this club is small.
- 5.12 Nevertheless we welcome continued discussion with UGC regarding ATC clearance flexibility, should a cross-country flight be planned to operate via the BTMA. NATS believes that ATC clearances may be possible, and that a glider pilot can request amendments to clearance whilst inside the Class D volumes.

Compliance with Airspace Change Process CAP725, including CAP493 MATS Part 1, the CAP413 RT Manual and CAA SI 2014-04

- 5.13 Some stakeholders requested clarification on the background of the technical ATC issues caused by CAA's SI 2014-04 incorporation into the MATS Part 1. It was beyond the scope of this consultation to attempt to explain how and why this SI changed the CAP493 MATS Part 1 and the CAP413 RT Manual – these are CAA documents. All air navigation service providers must follow these standard instruction documents unless an exemption was granted. This consultation was about the impacts these SI / MATS Part 1 changes had on the operation of the Belfast TMA, and the reason for the current exemption – not the history behind the SI / MATS Part 1 / CAA internal processes themselves.
- 5.14 We received challenges regarding our compliance with the CAA's airspace change guidance document known as 'CAP725', on the grounds that the consultation was not of twelve weeks duration. CAP725 states that consultations should follow the Cabinet Office's Code of Practice on Consultation. That code of practice has been superseded by the Cabinet Office Consultation Principles Guidance. This guidance recommends that *'Timeframes for consultation should be proportionate and realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response'*
- 5.15 Whilst twelve weeks is a typical duration, the scope and scale of any individual project is negotiated by the Sponsor (in this case NATS) with the Regulator (CAA's SARG) at the CAP725 Stage 1 Framework Brief.
- 5.16 Due to the relatively limited number of stakeholders for this consultation, and the pre-engagement carried out as per para 3.2, it was agreed by the CAA that a duration of nine weeks and two days was proportionate and realistic.
- 5.17 We mutually identified the date of AIRAC 05/2016 (28th April 2016) as the ideal implementation date because it would align with the publication schedule of the most relevant 1:500,000 scale VFR chart.
- 5.18 It was logical to present the proposal to the CAA such that, if approval was granted, the chart could be updated and published at the right time.
- 5.19 This timescale was agreed with the CAA and complies with their requirements.

**Retention of CAA Exemption
(including discussion of CAA Belfast Airspace Report)**

- 5.20 Some stakeholders requested copies of the CAA exemption and the full text of the CAA report mentioned within the consultation document. These stakeholders were referred to the CAA because they are not NATS' documents to share.
- 5.21 Retaining the exemption was suggested. This was not progressed for the reasons explained in the consultation document para 5.2.
- 5.22 Some stakeholders who received a copy of the CAA report claimed that the outcome of this proposal is pre-determined due to the contents of that report. NATS is progressing this proposal in the normal way following CAP725 process, without prejudicing the CAA's regulatory role. Queries regarding the airspace change process should be addressed to the CAA as per Section 8.

Review the entire airspace

- 5.23 This was suggested, both fully and in part. It was not progressed, for the reasons explained in the consultation document paras 5.3 and 5.4.
- 5.24 However a future airspace change project covering parts of Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland is planned. BTMA arrangements will be considered as part of that project.
- 5.25 This future project will conduct its own stakeholder engagement and consultation exercises, and will be publicised in due course. Such projects take significant time to reach these stages.

Adverse financial impact

- 5.26 Two paragliding schools stated the proposal would impact their income due to potential restriction of their operation, at sites beneath Class E volumes that would become Class D under this proposal.
- 5.27 These schools requested to be considered for an LoA as per UHPC, and will be contacted in due course.

6 **Conclusions**

- 6.1 The consultation revealed that:
- a. Most groups and individuals would not be significantly impacted by this proposal; and
 - b. Organisations primarily concerned with non-RT VFR flight would be most impacted.
- 6.2 The preferred solution is therefore being progressed. Specifically, we propose to change the two BTMA volumes, BTMA1 and BTMA2, from Class E to Class D.
- 6.3 We will mitigate the impact on the majority of affected airspace users as much as possible (the UHPC's members) via LoA, to provide segregated areas where they can operate under the agreed terms. These LoA negotiations are being organised at the time of writing this report.

7 **What happens next?**

- 7.1 We will write and submit an Airspace Change Proposal to the CAA as outlined in the consultation document and this feedback report's Section 6 above.
- 7.2 We expect this to happen at the beginning of 2016.
- 7.3 The CAA will then study the proposal to decide if it has merit, and will publish a decision on its website.
- 7.4 If the CAA decides to approve this proposal, we plan to implement the change in April 2016 to align with the 1:500,000 VFR chart publishing schedule.

8 **Compliance with the airspace change process, including consultation**

- 8.1 If you have questions or comments regarding the conduct of the airspace change process (also known as CAP725), please contact the CAA:

Airspace Business Coordinator
Re: Belfast TMA Classification
Safety and Airspace Regulation Group
CAA House
45-59 Kingsway
London

WC2B 5TE

Email: airspace.policy@caa.co.uk

9 **Appendix A: How responses were categorised into themes**

All responses were read and analysed using the following categorisation structure, which was based on common types of comment or context received during the consultation. .

- 9.1 No or minimal impact on ops
 - a. Makes no real difference to my flight/operation
 - b. I already use the RT and would continue to do so
 - c. My operation does not generally happen in or near the BTMA
- 9.2 Positive impact on ops (safety improvement)
 - a. Removal of partially unknown airspace environment
 - b. Reduces risk as all flights would be 'known'
 - c. Class D is safer than Class E
- 9.3 Adverse impact (restrictive airspace classification)
 - a. Requirement for RT means my operation would be curtailed
 - b. The proposed classification of airspace would impact my operation
 - c. Even if I had RT and requested an ATC clearance, I would not be able to comply with that clearance due to the nature of my flight
 - d. Would cause me to fly around or beneath the airspace whereas previously I could fly through
- 9.4 Airspace change process failure (CAP725)
 - a. Consultation period shorter than normal
 - b. Request for CAA supporting documentation was slow to be returned, effectively further reducing the consultation period
 - c. Inadequate stakeholder pre-engagement
 - d. The outcome is pre-determined
- 9.5 Retain the exemption
 - a. Exemption could stand permanently
 - b. Exemption could remain until a full review of the airspace
 - c. There is no problem currently, therefore no action is required
- 9.6 Review the entire airspace
 - a. Release some parts of the existing airspace to Class G, leaving the rest
 - b. Review all or part of the volumes or bases
 - c. Cost of a wider-ranging consultation is irrelevant
- 9.7 Adverse financial impact
 - a. The income or value of my business may be affected
- 9.8 Items out of scope were not specifically counted. This included internal CAA processes regarding SI 2014-04, CAP493 MATS Part 1 and CAP413 RT Manual.

End of report