

PE1804/BB

Petitioner submission of 1 December 2020

A presentation was made by HIAL at the Convention of the Highlands & Islands, Millport, 2018. Representing HIAL were Lorna Jack, Chair of the HIAL Board, and Inglis Lyon, HIAL Managing Director.

I mentioned at the Petitions Committee hearing that their presentation needed public scrutiny. A verbatim transcript of the meeting is [available](#). I encourage the Committee to read this transcript in full as I believe it demonstrates that little is actually known by the HIAL Board and MD about Air Traffic Control and Remote Tower systems and that all those present at the Convention were misinformed.

The presentation was introduced by Humza Yousaf, then Minister for Transport & the Isles, stating:

"I think there's probably a few misconceptions around what remote air traffic means".

In my view, the HIAL presentation only introduced more misconceptions and few, if any, facts.

My concerns are outlined below, starting with the most serious:

In response to a question from Alastair Nicolson of HIE, asking if remote towers would allow planes to come any lower before they get caught up with the fog, Inglis Lyon said: "It should allow you to land on a sixpence at the end of the runway."

This is entirely untrue. In fact, remote towers and their associated equipment have no effect whatsoever on the existing limits imposed on aircraft making an approach to land in fog.

Councillor James Stockan, Leader of Orkney Islands Council, asked if the ATMS project would be compatible with the extensive internal air service within the Orkney Islands. Inglis Lyon responded that not only would there not be a conflict, "it could almost be part of a solution to help grow these services. You could be talking about extending these services out into periods of the evening, which you don't currently do because you don't have lights on the runway and things like that."

Pressed by Councillor Stockan on whether that meant that small planes could land on a remote airstrip with this technology, in the evening without having any extra lights, Inglis Lyon states that "there would have to be infrastructure work done on that airport but there is the potential to increase the operating radius."

Again, remote towers and their associated equipment will have no effect whatsoever on what is being discussed. Having a remote tower at Kirkwall will only enable aircraft operations at Kirkwall. No civil passenger carrying aeroplane can land during Official Night (defined as 30 minutes after sunset to 30 minutes before sunrise) at an aerodrome without runway lights. It is an odd claim to be made by the HIAL MD.

Both of the above comments suggest that the HIAL MD either does not understand the capabilities of remote towers or is deliberately misleading his audience. Either way, this is not good.

The HIAL MD also claimed in his presentation that local recruitment and training of Air Traffic Controllers from scratch is unsuccessful and that people with the correct skills in the Islands are hard to find. He rudely refers to the most recent intake of locally recruited Air Traffic Controller trainees as: "one certainty and 4 iffies", when it comes to the likelihood of them successfully becoming fully qualified Air Traffic Controllers.

For your information, all 5 successfully qualified and work for HIAL, as is the case for the previous 6 locally recruited Controller trainees. HIAL's recruitment practices are to blame for their difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. In 2015, HIAL recruited 6 Controllers from Sweden. Within 4 years they had all returned to Sweden having gained qualifications and experience.

The one thing the MD was correct in saying, however, is that HIAL cannot compete on salary with other Air Traffic Providers.

I believe that the whole presentation was designed to be as negative as possible about current methods of HIAL Air Traffic Control, and as positive as possible about the HIAL Remote Towers project. Sadly, it seems to me that the facts are few and far between.

I believe that both the HIAL Chair & MD should be ashamed of this presentation, considering that their audience included a Scottish Government Minister and members of Local Authorities.

The content of the transcript is the subject of ridicule amongst Air Traffic Staff and Pilots.