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# Passengers could be put at risk by EU plans to lengthen pilots' hours

**Passengers could be put at risk by European plans to lengthen pilots' working hours, MPs have warned.**



European safety regulators want to ease pilots' flying hours restrictions Photo: PA



By [David Millward](#), Transport Editor

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But the changes drawn up by the European Aviation Safety Agency would water down rules in Britain which are among the strictest in the European Union.

EASA, which has come under pressure to ease restrictions and impose a level playing field across all 27 members of the EU, has drafted proposals which would lengthen working hours.

But in a report published today the Transport Select Committee has voiced horror at the proposals, noting that there is a link between long duty hours and an increased risk of accidents.

“A lowest common denominator approach to flight time limitations will benefit neither passengers, airlines nor crew,” the MPs have said.

One of the changes would mean that a pilot could be at the controls of an aircraft 22 hours after getting up.

“This is an extraordinary figure considering that even 17 hours of sustained wakefulness can produce performance deficits equivalent to that displayed when drunk,” the report adds.

“Given that 43% of pilots report involuntarily falling asleep whilst working under the current regulatory regime, there is a clear risk that these proposals will invite further fatigue amongst aircrew.

According to evidence presented to the Committee by the British Airlines Pilots Association the proposals would increase the number of hours a pilot could spend at work from 16 hours 15 minutes a day to 20 hours.

Other changes, Balpa said, would increase the maximum shift time for a long haul flight with two pilots from 12 to 14 hours.

This change would spare airlines the expense of having to pay for a third pilot on the flight deck for long haul flights to destinations such as Los Angeles.

The EASA proposals would also increase the workload on short-haul pilots who perform several take-offs and landings a day.

Proposed changes would only see the daily flight time reduced after the third take off of the day which, pilots say, flies in the face of scientific evidence of the dangers of fatigue brought on by performing the manoeuvres several times a day.

The Committee has called for sweeping changes to the proposals before they are adopted.

“I am very concerned,” said Louise Ellman, the committee’s chairman. “Britain has a very good safety record and there is now a risk it will be put in jeopardy.

“There is also a worrying culture of not reporting fatigue because people fear they will be seen as weak and harm their career.

“EASA’s current proposals should be revised before the Government makes any commitment to their adoption. It is important that the Government addresses our concerns as the legislative process continues in Europe.”

A Balpa spokesman welcomed the MPs' report who said it should be a “wake up call” to the Government.

‘The MPs are right to say that the proposed rules accept “a higher level of fatigue” and “could well lead to a situation where the accident rate will increase.” Given that we totally agree that these rules must be improved before adoption could be considered by the UK.

A Department for Transport spokesman signalled that the Government will not rubber stamp the EASA plans, which will need the agreement of all member states.

“The safety of the travelling public is paramount, which is why we have been clear that we would only support EASA’s final proposals if the UK’s Civil Aviation Authority are content that they provide an appropriate level of protection against crew fatigue.