

Pilots warn European flight-time changes ‘are a danger to public safety’

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New European pilot fatigue proposals are “a danger to public safety”, pilots’ union Balpa claims.

The new regulations could legally allow pilots to land their aircraft 22 hours after they had woken for the day, Balpa said.

The organisation said it was worried that the UK’s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) appeared to be supporting the proposals.

Balpa highlighted its concerns yesterday at a House of Commons Transport Committee hearing into flight time limitations.

Airlines and the CAA were also among those giving evidence to MPs. Before the meeting, Balpa general secretary Jim McAuslan said: “Twenty hours of wakefulness is far from the only part of the proposals which give us serious concern.

“Compared to the UK’s domestic rules, the EU proposals would see pilots being able to fly further – as far as California – with no back-up crew and, contrary to scientific advice, allow pilots to do up to seven early starts in a row, which is desperately fatiguing.”

He went on: “We have met with the CAA to try to get them to realise the dangers of what is being proposed here, but they seem intent on supporting this European scheme.

“We need the Government to say it won’t support this danger to public safety, and will demand that we either get the proposals to a much safer position, or retain our own domestic rules.

At the House of Commons Transport Committee hearing, Balpa’s head of safety, Dr Rob Hunter, told MPs that a Balpa poll showing that 43 per cent of pilots had fallen asleep on the flight deck was probably an underestimation.

Asked if the flight-time changes would lead to more accidents, Dr Hunter replied: “I would say so.”

Dr Hunter added that competition among airlines was intense: “If airlines spend on safety today, they might go out of business tomorrow.”

Kris Major, of the Unite union, said the proposals would lead to a 17 per cent increase in pilots’ workloads, while Jon Horne, executive board director of the European Cockpit Association, hoped flight-time regulations would be based “on science and not on economics”.