

Experts: EU Gambles with Flight Safety



The European Commission and the Danish Government ignores warnings that pilots make potentially catastrophic errors due to fatigue.

BY CLAUD BLOCK THOMSEN

The British expert on aviation safety Mick Spencer urges passengers across Europe to think twice next time they book a flight, when they will fly far at night.

This comes after the European Commission has been given green light by policy makers to implement new rules for pilots, opposed to the recommendations made by Mick Spencer and brought to the Commission by other experts.

"I would not like to fly with a pilot who works more than ten hours on a night flight. And then you start to make many more mistakes due to fatigue," says Mick Spencer. "It can be a big problem if the pilot, for example, has to land in bad weather. So the brain must be ready and it is not anymore after more than ten hours of night flight," he said.

He has been researching the relationship between fatigue and the number of errors that pilots do during a flight for several years.

10 hour flight is max.

His research is so recognized that the European Aviation Agency (EASA) asked him a few years ago to assess a proposal for new rules on working hours for pilots that the EU Commission would later put forward to the EU Parliament. Mick Spencer's attitude was clear. Based on various studies, he concluded that a pilot should not exceed work ten consecutive hours if the flight takes place at night.

Besides him, two other independent experts are asked to give their assessment. They were fully in line with Mick Spencer and also recommended that pilots should not exceed work ten hours a night. Spencer's surprise was therefore great when the EU Commission presented its new proposal. While putting up a proposal to reduce pilots' maximum working hours at night from 11 hours and 45 minutes to 11 hours, the proposal was still significantly more than what he and the other two researchers found responsible.

Inserted box: AIRCRAFT SAFETY

The case in brief

Tired pilots has been a hot political issue after the Politiken two years ago showed that many Danish pilots find that they are often so exhausted due to long and irregular working hours that they make potentially dangerous mistakes. A survey among Danish pilots from companies like SAS, Norwegian and Thomas Cook Airlines showed that nine out of ten had made mistakes due to fatigue.

The errors focused that they had entered incorrect information into the plane's computers, misunderstood orders from the control tower and forgot to turn the wheels off before landing.

Varying explanations

Last week the European Commission made it through with its proposal, with a majority in the European Parliament in favor of it.

"I am very surprised, because I fear that this will lead to a gradual degradation of the high standard of flight safety, hitherto existing in Europe," said Mick Spencer.

The European Commission recognizes, according to Irina Petrova, who is responsible for the Unit for Flight Safety, that the new rules do not follow the recommendations of the experts who her own EU system would otherwise have had approached. "But it is because the experts only referred to one study from 1998, which established a limit of 10 hours. It was designed so that it had no relevance to the situation in Europe," she says.

In their reports, however, researchers looked at several different studies of the problems of long night flights.

When Politiken confronts her with this fact she refuses first to comment, referring to the European Aviation Agency, which has prepared rules and that she did not have the papers in front of her. Whereupon she comes with a new explanation. "The other studies that experts refer to are not based on scientific methods. There is a lot of literature on the subject, but I would not call it scientific studies" she says and refuses to answer more questions.

Lobbyists obstruct

Mick Spencer is deeply shocked. "It's ridiculous. The Commission has devoted all their efforts on trying to belittle our recommendations because it does not want to implement them. I thought - perhaps naively - that I would be involved in constructive cooperation. Instead, it has proven to be a highly politicized process," he said.

At home, he gets support from Mads Klokke attached to the Flight Medicine at Glostrup Hospital and in addition, Clinical Manager of Ear, Nose and Throat Department at the hospital .

"If you work more than ten hours a night, you start to make 50 percent more mistakes and compromising flight safety," he said and criticized the commission's behavior. "Everyone knows that there is an extremely strong lobbying from airlines in this area. The Commission has been clearly put pressure on," he says.

The official dominion

The President of the Danish pilots, Lars Bjørking, believes that the risk of a plane crash is now getting bigger.

"We ended up in a situation where it is politicians and officials who assess what is reasonable, rather than the scientific experts who specialize on the relationship between sleep and aircraft," he says, whereas in the United States pilots may not work more than ten hours at night.

In the EU parliament it was Liberal trafikordfører Anne V. Jensen last week voting the Commission proposal through, even if she 'as a rule' is not satisfied that the Commission ignored the expert settings. "But the new rules are an improvement compared to the existing rules, and then we take it step by step," she says.

The Government supports the Commission

Also, the Danish Government supports the Commission's new proposals. Politiken would have spoken to Transport Minister Pia Olsen Dyhr (SF), but her press officer announced that "she did not have time."

Instead Pia Olsen Dyhr sent an email where she also acknowledges that the EU has not followed all the recommendations of the experts since not on all areas there has been sufficient scientific evidence to base the rules on '.

"I am pleased, however, that the maximum night flight time of 11 hours is a reduction from the current maximum of 11 hours and 45 minutes" wrote the Minister of Transport.

Unofficial translation – original text below

Ressource: <http://politiken.dk/oekonomi/arbejdsmarked/ECE2105062/eksperter-eu-gambler-med-flysikkerhed/>

Offentliggjort:

18. okt. 2013 KL. 06.00

© POLITIKEN.dk

Ekspert: EU gambler med flysikkerhed



træthed. Danske piloter frygter ulykker, fordi EU tillader, at de kan arbejde flere timer om natten, end eksperter anbefaler. - Foto: Finn Frandsen

EU-kommissionen og den danske regering ignorerer advarsler om, at piloter laver potentielt katastrofale fejl på grund af træthed.

AF **CLAUS BLOK THOMSEN**

Den britiske ekspert i flysikkerhed Mick Spencer opfordrer passagerer i hele Europa til at tænke sig godt om, næste gang de bestiller en flybillet, hvor de skal flyve langt om natten.

Det sker, efter at EU-kommissionen har fået grønt lys af politikerne til at gennemføre nye regler for piloter, som går stik imod de anbefalinger, som Mick Spencer og andre eksperter er kommet med til kommissionen.

»Jeg ville ikke bryde mig om at flyve med en pilot, der arbejder mere end ti timer på en natflyvning. For derefter begynder man at lave mange flere fejl på grund af træthed«, siger Mick Spencer.

»Det kan blive et stort problem, hvis piloten for eksempel skal lande i dårligt vejr. Så skal hjernen være klar, og det er den ikke efter mere end ti timers natflyvning«, siger han.

Selv har han i adskillige år forsket i sammenhængen mellem træthed og antallet af fejl, som piloter laver under en flyvning.

10 timers flyvning er maks

Hans forskning er så anerkendt, at Det Europæiske Luftfartsagentur (Easa) for et par år siden bad ham om at vurdere et forslag til nye arbejdstidsregler for piloter, som EU-kommissionen senere skulle fremlægge.

Mick Spencers indstilling var klar. Baseret på en række forskellige undersøgelser konkluderede han, at en pilot højst bør arbejde ti timer i træk, hvis flyvningen foregår om natten.

Ud over ham blev to andre uafhængige eksperter bedt om at komme med deres vurdering.

De var helt på linje med Mick Spencer og anbefalede også, at piloter højst bør arbejde ti timer om natten.

Spencers overraskelse var derfor stor, da EU-kommissionen fremlagde sit nye forslag. For godt nok lagde forslaget op til at reducere piloters maksimale arbejdstid om natten fra 11 timer og 45 minutter til 11 timer.

Men det var stadig væsentlig mere, end hvad han og de to andre forskere fandt ansvarligt.

Skiftende forklaringer

I sidste uge kom EU-kommissionen igennem med sit forslag, da et flertal i EU-parlamentet bakkede op om det.

»Jeg er stærkt forundret, fordi jeg frygter, at det her vil føre til en gradvis nedbrydning af den høje standard for flysikkerhed, der hidtil har været gældende i Europa«, siger Mick Spencer.

I EU-kommissionen erkender Irina Petrova, der er ansvarlig for enheden for flysikkerhed, at de nye regler ikke følger anbefalingerne fra de eksperter, som hendes eget EU-system ellers selv havde henvendt sig til.

»Men det skyldes, at eksperterne kun refererede til én undersøgelse fra 1998, der fastlagde en grænse på 10 timer. Den var udformet sådan, at den ikke havde nogen relevans for forholdene i Europa«, lyder det fra hende i første omgang.

LÆS OGSÅ [Danske flyveledere deler sikkerhedsfrygt](#)

I rapporterne henviser forskerne imidlertid til flere forskellige undersøgelser af problemerne ved lange natflyvninger.

Da Politiken konfronterer hende med den kendsgerning, afviser hun først at udtale sig, med henvisning til at det er Det Europæiske Luftfartsagentur, som har udarbejdet reglerne, og at hun ikke har papirerne foran sig. Hvorefter hun kommer med en ny forklaring.

»De øvrige undersøgelser, som eksperterne henviser til, er ikke baseret på videnskabelige metoder. Der er en masse litteratur om emnet, men jeg vil ikke kalde det videnskabelige studier«, siger hun og afviser at svare på flere spørgsmål.

Lobbyister spænder ben

Mick Spencer er dybt chokeret.

»Det er jo latterligt. Kommissionen har brugt alle kræfter på at forsøge at nedgøre vores anbefalinger, fordi den ikke ønsker at gennemføre dem. Jeg troede – måske naivt – at jeg skulle være med i et konstruktivt samarbejde. I stedet har det vist sig at være en stærkt politiseret proces«, siger han.

Herhjemme får han opbakning fra Mads Klokke, der er tilknyttet Flyvemedicinsk Klinik på Glostrup Hospital og derudover er klinikchef på øre-, næse- og halsafdelingen på Rigshospitalet.

LÆS OGSÅ [Ryanair fyrer pilot efter kritik af flysikkerhed i britisk tv](#)

»Hvis man arbejder over ti timer om natten, begynder man at lave over 50 procent flere fejl, og det kompromitterer flysikkerheden«, siger han og kritiserer kommissionens opførsel.

»Alle ved, at der er en ekstremt stærk lobbyisme fra flyselskaber på det her område. Kommissionen er helt klart blevet trykket på maven«, siger han.

Embedsvælde

Formanden for de danske piloter, Lars Bjørking, mener, at risikoen for en flyulykke nu bliver større.

»Vi er endt i en situation, hvor det er politikere og embedsmænd, der vurderer, hvad der er forsvarligt, frem for de videnskabelige eksperter, der forsker i sammenhængen mellem søvn og flysikkerhed«, siger han og henviser til, at i USA må piloter ikke arbejde mere end ti timer om natten.

LÆS OGSÅ [Ryanair skal betale millionbøde](#)

I EU-parlamentet var Venstres trafikordfører Anne V. Jensen i sidste uge med til at stemme kommissionens forslag igennem, også selv om hun »som udgangspunkt« ikke er tilfreds med, at kommissionen ignorerer ekspertindstillingerne.

»Men de nye regler er en forbedring i forhold til de eksisterende regler, og så må vi tage det trin for trin«, siger hun.

Regeringen støtter kommissionen

Også den danske regering støtter op om kommissionens nye forslag. Politiken ville gerne have talt med transportminister Pia Olsen Dyhr (SF), men det meddelte hendes pressemedarbejder, at »hun ikke havde tid til«.

I stedet sendte Pia Olsen Dyhr en mail, hvor hun også erkender, at EU ikke har fulgt alle anbefalingerne fra eksperterne, »da der ikke på alle områder har været tilstrækkeligt videnskabeligt materiale at basere reglerne på«.

»Jeg glæder mig dog over, at den maksimale nattjenestetid på 11 timer er en reduktion i forhold til gældende maksimum på 11 timer og 45 minutter«, skriver transportministeren.

Ressource: <http://politiken.dk/oekonomi/arbejdsmarked/ECE2105062/eksperter-eu-gambler-med-flysikkerhed/>

Offentliggjort:

18. okt. 2013 KL. 06.00

© POLITIKEN.dk