

The Birth of EMF

Keith Negal, Treasurer and UK delegate to the EMF, reports on the birth of this new sports aviation organisation

Conceived at Long Marston in August, after a relatively short gestation period President Dominique Mereuze announced the birth of the European Microlight Federation in January. The first General Conference of the European Microlight Federation was held in Paris at the headquarters of the FFPLUM over the weekend of the 24th and 25th of January. Microlighting organisations from 16 European countries with a total membership of some 40,000 joined following an initiative by the BMAA of the UK, the FFPLUM of France and the DULV of Germany to form the EMF. This new organisation is not intended to be a talking shop but has some real work to do in defending and extending the privileges of European microlighters.

Licensing is a good example of this. Throughout Europe, while the training given to microlight pilots is broadly similar, the one significant licensing difference is in the medical requirement. In France a microlight pilot needs no medical and the FFPLUM are determined that this will not change. In the UK the NPPL medical is based on the driving licence requirements; if you are fit to drive a car you are fit to fly a solo aircraft up to 2 tonnes and if you are fit to drive a heavy goods vehicle you may carry pre-solo passengers. Despite the lack of any statistical evidence to support the need, however, an increasing number of European countries are insisting on a JAR-FCL Class 2 medical.

Apart from the fact that it is more expensive and unnecessarily onerous, why should we care? A quick glance at the Irish AIC 14/93 (an old document but still current) will give you a clue. Paragraph 4.3 says "Holders of a Private Pilots Licence issued by an EC Member State which is restricted to operation of microlight category aircraft only- - may automatically exercise the privileges of such licence in Ireland, provided-" The UK NPPL is not restricted to microlight operations and the Irish CAA is pedantically interpreting the AIC to exclude UK NPPL holders (but not holders of the old PPL(A) microlights) from flying in Ireland. The medical is being cited as a tangible difference between its requirements and those of the NPPL. Not only does this affect NPPL holders who want to fly to Teddyfield, it also affects NPPL holders in Northern Ireland and, of course, makes the UK NPPL licence invalid for those Irish pilots who would previously have trained under the UK system.

However illogical, what the Irish CAA is doing today any other European CAA may do tomorrow. To tackle this, the EMF has formed two teams, one to look at medicals and the other to deal with licences in general.

The aim of these teams will be to collect and present data from all over Europe to support an argument for a more relaxed licensing regime for microlighters who don't already enjoy one. The task then will be to prepare a case that can be used by the EMF member associations to approach their own CAAs with the expertise of a strong EMF behind them.

Remember that the new European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) that now rules aviation in Europe has decided that it will leave microlighting to the national CAAs. This means that cases made by the EMF will be taken by the national associations to their own CAAs and not all CAAs are as pro-sports aviation as that of France or the UK. It is hoped that these less sympathetic bureaucratic bodies will respond positively to a well-presented case, supported by statistical evidence and examples from other European countries and backed by a pan-European expert organisation.

Other EMF teams have been formed to take similar action in the areas of airworthiness and cross-border travel in Europe and it is in the latter that the EMF has achieved an early success. In the short period since the creation of the European Microlight Federation the German DULV has been

able to persuade the German authorities to adopt a similar entry arrangement to the French. The French have a declarative system, similar to that adopted for motor vehicles. If you, as a microlight pilot, are licensed in the UK, for example, and if your aircraft meets the French requirements (as do all UK BCAR Section S microlights flown to the correct weight...) then you don't have to prove it, any more than you do when you drive your car to France. The onus is on you to be within the law and the courts will deal with you if subsequently you are found not to have been so. For the Germans to adopt such a change is a great step forward. Other EMF members can now go to their own CAAs with a case based on the French and German examples (with their reduced administrative costs) to argue for change.

The advantage of the French approach to microlighting, used as a model by the EMF, is that it removes a huge element of bureaucracy from the system. We Brits always bang on about the weird regulations of Europe (straight bananas and all that) but we tend to take a simple regulation and then build a huge and unnecessary layer of bureaucracy to impose, inspect and enforce these rules. The French approach is very different, at least as far as microlight aviation is concerned, and we can only benefit from spreading the word on this, in a rigorous and professional way, with the strength of all European microlighters behind us.

Countries represented at the first General Conference of the EMF:

Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany (DAeC & DULV), Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK