

ACP-2020-024 E-7 Wedgetail Operating Areas

Frequently Asked Questions

Please find a summary of responses to potential questions that are likely to form part of Stage 3 – Consultation for ACP-2020-024 – E-7 Wedgetail Operating Areas.

Note: This is a live document and will evolve as the Consultation Stage progresses.

Revision Number	Revised By	Notes	Date
Initial Issue V1.0	Project Lead		07 Mar 23

1. What is being proposed?

A The MOD is replacing the now obsolete E-3D Sentry aircraft with the E-7 Wedgetail aircraft in 2024. The E-3D operated in several different orbits throughout the UK in the height band FL270 – FL350. Whilst the E-3D flew circular orbits (nominally 15nm radius) or racetracks between 2 x circular orbits the E-7 requires an area approx. 100nm x 20 nm to operate its Multi-role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) radar. This ACP proposes several new E-7 operating areas throughout the UK. Wherever possible they will be geographically co-located with the current E-3 orbit areas.

2. Why isn't "do nothing" an option?

A The current E-3 areas and associated orbits throughout the UK are designed for flying circular or racetrack patterns. Whilst the E-7 tracks could be accommodated in a few of the areas, the majority would only partially fit and in several cases are in the wrong orientation to optimise the E-7 MESA radar which need to be perpendicular to the threat axis. Whilst the E-3 orbits will remain until 2035 to accommodate occasional use by the NATO E-3A, they are due to be removed in 2035 when this aircraft ceases operations. A long-term solution out to 2050 is therefore sought to accommodate E-7 over its operational life.

3. Why isn't "do minimum" an option?

A Without dedicated operating areas the E-7 would have to operate in modified E-3 orbit areas, within the extant Managed Danger Area (MDA) complexes throughout the UK, or in Class C airspace on a track between 2 x random waypoints. Operating in modified E-3 orbits would reduce predictability for Air Traffic Units, not all the MDAs are large enough for E-7 operations, they are not available exclusively to the E-7 and many are geographically located in the wrong position for E-7 operations and finally operating between 2 x random waypoints (approx. 100nm apart) would generate different tracks on almost a daily basis, reduce the known traffic environment and complicate routine traffic management. This option was rejected at Stage 2 of the ACP process.

4. Are the proposed E-7 Areas Segregated?

A No. The proposed E-7 Areas will be non-segregated. This means that airline traffic can route through the areas as long as minimum lateral or vertical separation is maintained by Air Traffic Control.

5. How will the proposed E-7 Areas affect CO2 emissions.

A As the proposed E-7 areas are non-segregated airline traffic, on the vast majority of occasions, should not be required to change height or deviate from track to avoid them. As a result there will be a nil or extremely marginal increases in CO2 emissions. Without these new predictable and published areas it is likely that the airlines would require some form of re-routing or altitude changes thus increasing track miles and CO2 emissions.

6. How often will the E-7 operate in the proposed Areas?

A The E-7 is forecast to fly one sortie per day of up to 10 hours duration. The proposed areas in the North Sea and on the East coast will be used on a more frequent basis than those in the South West, Hebrides or Shetland. The ACP supporting documentation further expands on which areas will have higher usage. The E-7 will only operate in one of the 21 proposed areas at any one time. Some of the lesser used areas may only be used once or twice in a 3-month period.

7. How often will the NATO E-3A operate in the extant UK E-3 orbits?

A The NATO E-3A will occasionally fly in the extant UK E-3 orbits. Historically this has occurred on a frequency not exceeding 1 sortie a week. It is likely this will remain the same until 2035 when this aircraft is expected to cease operations. The vast majority of E-3A operations are flown in central Europe.

8. What are the vertical dimensions of the Proposed E-7 Areas?

A All the proposed areas are from FL270 to FL350. The E-7 will operate at a single Flight Level within that band only changing Flight Level with approval from Air Traffic Control. This is normally to avoid weather.

9. How does this proposal impact General Air Traffic (GAT)/Aerodromes?

A. This proposal should not affect GAT/Aerodromes as it is in Class C airspace in the bracket FL270 to FL350.

10. Will the new areas be utilised by any other aircraft?

A. No, the proposed areas are exclusively for RAF E-7 operations.

11. Will there ever be more than one E-7 operating at any one time in one or more areas?

A. On the vast majority of occasions there will only be one E-7 operating in a single area. Occasionally during large Exercises 2 aircraft could be airborne in different areas for a short duration to conduct a handover of the radar picture.