

# Airlines plead for regulators to unite on Boeing 737 Max's return

Airlines are calling on aviation regulators worldwide to work together to get Boeing Co.'s grounded 737 Max back in the skies and to prevent the regulatory response from splintering and slowing the jet's return.

As aviation bosses met in South Korea for their biggest gathering since the two 737 Max disasters, Ed Bastian, chief executive officer of Delta Air Lines Inc., led calls for coordinated regulatory action on Boeing's best-selling aircraft.

Combined approval from authorities across the globe affirming that the jet is safe to fly would help restore bruised consumer confidence in the Max, he said.

"It's very important that the regulators around the world unite and make a unified determination regarding the safety of the Max," Bastian told reporters in Seoul. "Keeping politics out of safety matters is important."

The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines, whose members include Max customers Singapore Airlines and Malaysia Airlines, warned that a fractured set of assessments of the Max's airworthiness by individual bodies risks prolonging the process. The 737 Max, a two-year-old model that has racked up thousands of orders, was grounded in March after a second crash triggered a wave of no-fly orders that started in China and ended with the US.

The threat posed to Boeing and the Max by separate approval processes by different watchdogs is clear: Even if the U.S.

Federal Aviation Administration signs off on Boeing's proposed safety upgrade to the Max, the plane's international reach would be limited if other countries haven't cleared the jet to fly. Additional months of groundings in Europe and China, key markets for intercontinental travel, would be particularly damaging.

"The challenge is just as we saw a cascade of shutdowns, it might be more drawn out in terms of the ungroundings," Andrew Herdman, director general of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines, said in an interview in Seoul. Herdman wasn't confident that regulators could set aside their individual differences. "Desirable? Yes. Achievable? No."

Bastian said a swift resolution would be the best outcome for the industry and for Delta, which doesn't even fly the Max. Delta is building its business around offshore markets, he said.

Fatal crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia, which killed 346 people, have shaken confidence in an aircraft certification process that for decades has taken its lead from the U.S. The FAA last month hosted dozens of counterparts from around the world to discuss the steps required to resume Max flights.

It's not yet clear that everyone's on the same page. Before the meeting, Indonesia, where the first Max crashed in October, said it might keep the plane grounded until 2020 in order to ensure it's safe.

Officials from China, Canada and the European Union have also signaled they intend to independently review changes to the Boeing planes before restoring flights. South Korean authorities are also said to be making their own decision, after closely monitoring steps taken by regulators in Europe and China.

SpiceJet Ltd., one of Boeing's biggest customers for the 737 Max, said every regulator needs to come to the same verdict on

the aircraft. But it may take some time, said Chairman Ajay Singh.

“Some people will get to the satisfaction level faster and some people will take some more time,” Singh said in an interview in Seoul. “But eventually everybody has to come along.”

There will be no Max flights at Ethiopian Airlines, which lost Flight 302 in March, until every regulator has approved the plane and other airlines have resumed flights, Chief Executive Officer Tewolde Gebremariam told reporters in Seoul.

“Since we decided to be the last one, it means that all of them have to approve first,” he said.

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