



MARK R. BAKER
President and CEO

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Dear Friend,

I write today to bring to your attention a critical issue in hopes that, together, we can help avoid a tourism catastrophe in The Bahamas.

As you know, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), the world's largest aviation organization, representing hundreds of thousands of pilots, has long promoted The Bahamas as a destination, including through our Bahamas Pilot Guide. AOPA has also worked closely with The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism over the years to promote general aviation flying to your country as private pilots and their guests spend significant resources on hotels, dining, and other activities. AOPA also stepped up recently and supported travel to The Bahamas when the United States government issued a travel advisory.

On July 1st, much to our surprise, the Bahamian government imposed egregious customs fees on private pilots. These pilots primarily fly small aircraft and often bring family and friends to visit the islands. They are private aircraft operators and do not fly for hire but are now being forced to pay more in fees than a major commercial airline transporting hundreds of people.

Today, under the new Bahamas Customs fee structure, a private pilot flying in a small airplane to the Bahamas as a tourist now pays as much if not more than a Boeing 737 operated by a major commercial airline. These fees on private aircraft are simply unfair, unreasonable, and unsustainable. Many pilots have already stopped flying to The Bahamas and I suspect many will not return as long as this fee structure remains in place. I have heard private pilots are discussing boycotting the Bahamas until this fee issue is resolved.

Unlike private flying, major airlines do not transport people to the Out Islands. Moreover, a yacht travels with its own beds, its own food and alcohol, its own crew, its own jet skis, its own fishing and diving gear, and its own entertainment—but every time a private aircraft touches down on your island, those luxuries are sought out by private pilots and their guests. These pilots bring valuable business to your islands and help stimulate your local economy. We hope Bahamian officials will realize this and reconsider how they are negatively impacting tourism.

On September 5th, I requested a meeting in The Bahamas with Prime Minister Davis to discuss the new customs fees and how they are deterring pilots from visiting the Islands. Unfortunately, I have not received a response to that request. AOPA has also proposed a much fairer fee structure (see attached) that would be advantageous to all. Again, Bahamian government officials have not responded. We remain hopeful Prime Minister Davis will revisit the AOPA fee proposal for private pilots so, together, we can continue to promote general aviation travel and preserve the long-standing relationship that AOPA and the government of The Bahamas has cultivated for years.

Regards,