



Government of Samoa

**OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF WORKS, TRANSPORT
AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

(MINISTRY OF WORKS, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE; ELECTRIC POWER CORPORATION;
SAMOA WATER AUTHORITY; SAMOA AIRPORT AUTHORITY; SAMOA PORTS AUTHORITY;
SAMOA SHIPPING CORPORATION; LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY);
SAMOA SHIPPING SERVICES; PACIFIC FORUM LINE

**GOVERNMENT ADDRESSES SAFETY CONCERNS REGARDING
FAGALII AIRPORT**

05 June 2023/Press Release/APIA – The Fagalii Airport has met all safety requirements and is ready for operation, the Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure (MWTI), Hon. Olo Fiti Afoa Vaai has assured.

“We would like to assure the public that the airport is safe to operate as usual,” Hon. Olo said.

“Prior to its reopening, the MWTI and Samoa Airport Authority (SAA) worked hand in hand in the first phase of rehabilitation to ensure we have implemented all the necessary safety measures and they will continue to do so to ensure the aerodrome achieves the highest standard of safety for both airlines and the people who will be coming through Fagalii.”

The areas of concern cited by Human Rights Protection Party’s Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi including very tall trees, families with modern homes, tall breadfruit trees and other tall communications structures also existed during their time in power, and yet Fagalii aerodrome still operated.

It’s ironic that he is oblivious to the decisions made during his tenure as Prime Minister which clearly clarified that the closure of Fagali’i Airport was made based on the financial interest of the former Government. The interest of the travelling public was not a consideration. And foremost, the safety of residents in the vicinity was never an issue.

1970 – 2005

Incepted in 1969, Fagalii commenced operations, April 1970. The first closure in 2005 was when Polynesian Airlines ceased operation of its Twin Otter aircraft. Based on this, it was not commercially viable for SAA to continue operating Fagalii and thus shut down. Although there have been rumors of a safety report appropriating this decision, there is no record of such a report.

2009 – 2019

Fagalii airport was reopened in 2009 by Polynesian Airlines based on a commercial decision to give them the competitive edge over two American Samoa based airlines, South Pacific Express and Inter Island Airways. Those airlines were flying larger and faster aircraft pitted against the slower Twin Otter's used by Polynesian Airlines.

Opened as a public airport, Polynesian Airlines were heavily criticized by Samoa Air and later Talofa Airways of privileged treatment. This was in direct contradiction of International Civil Aviation rules as an operator of a public airport. This drove the former Cabinet in 2018 to return the operation of Fagalii Airport to SAA. In preparation of the takeover, SAA commissioned a runway condition report and was conducted by GHD Company.

Under direction of former Cabinet, the Office of the Attorney General led the negotiations between SAA and Samoa Airways (formerly Polynesian Airlines) which was prolonged by Samoa Airways' non agreement with the settlement value of the airport. Failing to come to an agreement, the former Cabinet decided to shut down Fagalii Airport and return all operations to Faleolo Airport from 1 January 2020.

2023

Prior to its official reopening on May 29th 2023, the SAA implemented recommendations stated in the GHD report, including a full overlay of the runway and apron. Included in this overlay, the runway width has been corrected to 18 meters. The previous runway width was 14 meters and less in some sections.

As required under civil aviation rules, an obstacles limitation survey (OLS) has been completed and obstacles identified have been removed. The communications tower located in the Samoa College compound falls outside the parameters of the survey. However, the telecommunication company will be advised to take necessary mitigation measures to ensure the tower is distinguishable against the background which include aviation markings and installation of strobe lighting.

SECURITY CONCERNS

During its operation by Polynesian Airlines, the Fagalii Airport operated as non-security designated aerodrome. With the reopening, the MWTI has designated Fagalii as a security designated aerodrome, hence SAA has installed x-ray machines to screen departing passengers. In support of border protection, an x-ray has also been installed at arrivals for screening of cargo. The fence line has also been repaired. The height on the west and eastern ends of the airport is purposefully reduced so aircraft are able to clear the fence safely. Further as a security designated aerodrome, all airside access is sealed and controlled by 100% screening of all persons wishing to access airside.

RUNWAY AND FIRE PROTECTION

The Fagalii Airport runway and apron have been fully overlayed with a 10mm chip seal. The dimensions of the runway is 700m x 18m with apron space able to accommodate up to 4 aircrafts. The runway has been swept of loose chips. An extension of approximately 80 meters is being planned. The runway strip is 713m x 50m and is clear of debris with the shoulders graded.

International Aviation records has Fagalii Airport coded as a 1B aerodrome. In layman terms, the airport's physical characteristics include a runway of less than 800 meters, and aircrafts permitted to operate at aerodrome are De-Havilland Twin Otters only.

Furthermore, the Talofa Airways Chief Executive Officer's concerns cited by the media are misplaced as the Government is not interested in the benefit of one businessman. Talofa Airways' aircraft were purchased only a few years ago whilst Fagalii Airport was built in 1969. The state-owned Samoa Airways owns 3 Twin Otter Aircrafts.

“The Fagalii Airport was designed specifically to cater to Twin Otters, so as our other airports, Maota and Asau Savaii,” Hon. Olo said.

“Twin Otters can operate comfortably out of a 400 meter runway. Meanwhile all our airports are almost double that length.”

The dimensions of Maota and Asau runway is 700m x 15m and 640m x 15m respectively.

“What Talofa Airways should have done is proper research to seek aircrafts that suitably fit the specifications of already existing airports in Samoa,” the Minister of Works added.

“However, that is not the case with Talofa Airways whose aircraft requires more than 1000 meters of runway, hence they are not suited for Fagalii Airport. But Fagalii Airport is safe.

“They are welcome to continue operating from the Faleolo International Airport.”

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) has been signed between SAA and FESA to provide fire protection services for Fagalii Airport. This is a temporary arrangement until SAA are able to provide a fire appliance for the airport.

SAFETY AUDIT

A safety compliance audit was conducted on 15-19 May 2023 by the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO) on behalf of the MWTI, who are the appropriate legal authority as aviation regulator.

SAA has submitted to the Ministry a corrective action plan to mitigate the findings and recommendations of the audit.

We assure the public that the safety and wellbeing of travelers, Fagalii residents and SAA and airline staff is of utmost priority to the Government hence our dedication to meet all International Civil Aviation Organization safety requirements prior to its re-opening last month. Thus, in its second phase of rehabilitation, we aim to further improve the aerodrome to ensure the highest level of safety is achieved and maintained.