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Dear [REDACTED]

## **COVID-19 & AVIATION: ALLEVIATION FROM 80:20 SLOT RULES**

The impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak are increasingly being felt across Europe. This includes significant impacts on the aviation sector, with many airlines reporting considerable deterioration in passenger demand, consequently exacerbating pressures on commercial operations.

This is leading to the prospect of international 'ghost planes' carrying few passengers on board. An outcome which is both problematic for the airlines and needlessly damaging to our environment.

There are eight slot coordinated airports in the United Kingdom, several of which are exceptionally congested, including Heathrow, the world's busiest two-runway airport. I am deeply concerned that the "80:20", "use-it-or-lose-it" rule under Regulation 95/93 is compounding the risk of airlines flying empty or near-empty aircraft primarily to avoid losing their historic rights. Such behaviour would be entirely out of step with both the United Kingdom's and the European Union's climate commitments.

I know that the European Commission has already recommended, and the United Kingdom coordinator has granted, alleviation from the 80:20 rule for flights to and from mainland China and Hong Kong, a step which has been welcomed across industry. Given the international nature of COVID-19 I believe that this alleviation should now be widened.

I am writing to urge the Commission to act by introducing practical and proportionate measures which would allow flexibility and adaptability to respond as the picture develops. These could include temporary, 'rolling' alleviations and flexibility with the 80% usage threshold, implemented on a market-by-market basis or more broadly. I would welcome an approach which supported coordinators to respond proactively and proportionately by allowing them to drive forward solutions which fairly balance the interests of the environment and the industry as a whole.

My Department has been engaging extensively across the sector, with airlines, coordinated airports and our designated coordinator. Like the commission, my department is evidence-led, and the evidence presented to me from the sector demonstrates the urgency of the situation. If there is more we can do to support the Commission's considerations please do not hesitate to ask.

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