



FIVE QUESTIONS PRIVATE JET OWNERS SHOULD ASK BEFORE CHANGING AIRCRAFT REGISTRIES

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It is unusual for a private aircraft owner to consider a registry change without some level of crisis. Something has gone wrong. Delays are the new normal. Communication appears fragmented. Decisions are either too slow or too opaque. Flexibility of operation is reduced, not due to the aircraft's capabilities, but because the regulatory framework no longer accommodates the way the aircraft is being used.

For private aircraft owners who have been around the industry a while, this scenario will be all too familiar. What once was a comfortable and accommodating regulatory framework now feels constricting. Trust is lost, initially quietly and then suddenly. At this point, changing registries feels like a logical solution. It may be. It may not be. The question is: how much thought and analysis go into this decision before it is executed? It is a very important decision and one that can either solve the problems or recreate them under a new flag.

David Colindres experience at the [San Marino Aircraft Registry](#) has taught there a handful of questions that should be addressed prior to changing a registry.

T.O. Is the problem the regulatory framework, or how it is being applied?

D.C. This is the most important question and the most frequently overlooked. Few registry changes are ever driven by the presence of a rule. They are driven by interpretation, communication, and application of a rule. Owners experience friction when rules change without notice, when interpretations differ between individuals, or when decisions fail to align with reality. This is an important point. If the underlying legislative system is flawed but well-applied, changing registries does not necessarily correct the problem. The same standards are applied elsewhere, and the same issues can arise if expectations are misaligned. The owner should understand whether their dissatisfaction stems from a structural flaw or from inconsistencies, lack of clarity, and/or lack of continuity within the system. This understanding ensures that a registry change is not a lateral step, but a step forward.

T.O. What operational constraints am I really trying to eliminate?

D.C. What does an owner really want when they say they want more flexibility? What they really want is less friction. What does that friction look like? Is it a long wait for approval, vague answers, constant requests for documentation, difficulty making non-standard mission requests, or excessive escalation for routine issues? This question demands clarity. Where are we really losing time? Where are we really experiencing ambiguity and delay? Where are we really making decisions that are harder than they should be? A registry change should be scrutinized against these operational constraints. If a new registry can't demonstrate how it might handle those issues differently, then the disruption of a registry change might be more costly than any benefit achieved.

T.O.. Are costs an issue, or is it a lack of understanding about costs?

D.C. Cost is often cited as a motivator, but in reality, it rarely tells the whole story. Most owners accept that there is a cost to operating a private aircraft. The problem owners have is one of uncertainty. Unexpected charges, changing compliance requirements, or interpretation inconsistencies inject volatility into the budgeting and planning process. Over time, the volatility of the process far outweighs the absolute cost. This question changes the paradigm. It's not a discussion about cheaper or more expensive registries; it's a discussion about more or less predictable processes. Registries with transparent processes, known requirements, and known renewal processes can actually minimize overall operational costs, regardless of whether the fees are the lowest. It's not the fees that should be considered when changing registries; rather, it's whether the fees provide greater long-term cost transparency.

T.O. Do I trust the authority's judgment when things are not straightforward?

D.C. This is the question that's always lurking in the background, even when not openly discussed. Most stress is not caused by day-to-day compliance issues. Most stress is caused by inspections, special missions, or when the rules don't provide a clear solution to a problem. In those instances, it's the authority's judgment that's most important.

It's worth asking the owner to honestly evaluate their own feelings about the authority's judgment when things get complicated. Can they have a dialogue? Are the decisions reasonable or process-driven? Are the decisions contextual or contextualized away? It's not the oversight that's the problem when changing registries; it's the quality of the oversight. It's the judgment and the understanding of the operation. Trust is not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have. Without it, the best regulatory framework in the world can be a nightmare to operate within.

T.O. Will this change improve my long-term operating position, not just today's frustration?

D.C. Changes to the registry are often driven by a single event. A delayed approval. A contentious inspection. A seemingly arbitrary decision. All of these things are real and impactful. But they're not the foundation upon which a long-term structural change should be made. This is the fifth of the five questions that bring discipline to the decision. It's the long-term impact of the change, not just the short-term benefit. How does the registry support future needs, not just current needs? How does the registry evolve to meet future needs? How familiar are insurers, lenders, and future buyers with the registry? A registry that solves today's problem but imposes future limitations is not a strategic improvement. In fact, the best decisions are made from a long-term perspective, ensuring the aircraft is aligned with the authority that best supports long-term stability, growth, and flexibility.

Why these questions matter

For those currently experiencing frustration, the desire to act is strong. It's natural to want to move away from a problem as soon as possible. And while that's a reasonable instinct, the reality is that changing the registry is best done deliberately, not reactively.

The five questions slow the process down just enough to ensure clarity. They help the owner distinguish between service and structural problems. And they help the owner avoid having the same experience with a different registry, even though the underlying problems were not fully addressed.

An aircraft registry is not simply a designation. It is the context in which oversight is provided, decisions are made, and support is offered. It is the foundation upon which the operation is sustained year after year. Choosing the right one is not just a matter of comparative analysis. It is a judgment.

For owners looking to make a change, the most reliable approach to ensuring that the next registry is not just different but better aligned with the aircraft's operation is to ask the right questions before making a decision.

San Marino Aircraft Registry 'SMAR' journey began in 2012, under an exclusive Public-Private Partnership between the Government of San Marino and Aviation Registry Group 'ARG'. As our company has grown, so has our belief in San Marino's role and vision for impact in the aviation world. Today, we're proud of our short history of helping to create a brighter future for aircraft owners and operators.

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