

Anger at 'woeful' council action over helipads

Five months ago Waiheke's local board asked Auckland Council to review the increasing number of helicopters over the island - but the council has said it cannot fully monitor them and nothing can change until 2026. Sophie Boladeras reports.

Helicopter flights over Waiheke are heating up again this summer - as is the conversation around their imprint on the island's character, public amenity, safety and the environment.

At the December Waiheke Local Board meeting last week, members expressed frustration with a council report responding to requests for stricter rules and regulations, as well as increased monitoring of all helipads on the island.

Also at the meeting, Kim Whitaker of lobby group Quiet Sky Waiheke said the council's memorandum "woefully" failed to address any of the concerns raised by the board and the Waiheke community.

"We urge the board to reject the council memo and to seek, in association with councillors Pippa Coom and Chris Darby, an immediate application by the council to the environment court for a declaration as to the non-complying activity status for helipads."

Members of Quiet Sky Waiheke also asked the board and councillors to press for a plan change "without delay", saying current rules were decided inappropriately and resulted in adverse effects for the community.

Five months ago, the board put its

notice of motion to council, asking for a review of all island helipads to determine if any had lapsed or could be amended to include stricter conditions, such as a requirement for tracking devices to show the approach and departure routes of all flights.

It asked for an information report including options to increase control over the number of helicopter pads being consented, their locations, the number of flights per helicopter pad, and the means by which to manage cumulative and specific effects of the number of helipad consents and flights.

The July motion also asked the council to enable public notification for all helipad consents so people directly affected in the vicinity or on projected flight paths could share their feedback.

Members went on to ask council staff to determine whether it would be feasible to apply a moratorium on helicopter pad consents until such controls were implemented.

But despite the board's concerns, council staff said last week that a moratorium can't be instated and any real change to Waiheke's helicopter situation is unlikely until 2026, when a review of Auckland's



unitary plan is due to begin.

At this time, provisions for the Hauraki Gulf Islands, including those relating to helipads, will be evaluated in detail and incorporated into the unitary plan, which applies more restrictive provisions overall to the establishment of helipads in residential and rural areas.

The time it will take for this to happen, however, doesn't fly with local board members, who say that the current situation is not "sustainable or tolerable" for the community and that the number of helipads on the island might have doubled to around 100 by the time the Hauraki Gulf Islands (HGI) Plan is brought into the Auckland Unitary Plan.

The council report said an alternative would be to apply prohibited activity status through a plan change to the Hauraki Gulf Islands Plan.

However, planners said the legal tests for prohibited activity status are very high, as the underlying premise for the status is that there are no circumstances in which helipads are appropriate - "an extremely difficult position to establish".

The council has recognised that the Hauraki Gulf Islands Plan's provisions for helipad consents are less strict regarding resource consent activity status and noise standards than the Auckland Unitary Plan.

"However, the HGI plan enables a broad assessment of impacts on visual amenity and aural amenity, including an assessment of cumulative effects, and enables the council to decline resource consent applications for helipads on Waiheke,"

Waiheke Covid Immunisation Centre

Located in Oneroa

CLOSED 23 Dec to 4 Jan

OPEN again from 5 Jan

Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm



Please go to <https://bookmyvaccine.covid19.health.nz/> to make an appointment