

# Aviation expert weighs in on safety in the skies

Outdated aviation rules raise safety concerns for Waiheke, where helipads and chopper movements have exploded over the past 10 years, says a Wellington-based aviation expert.

Mike Haines, a former manager of aeronautical services for the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of New Zealand, who now operates a specialist aviation consultancy, says a special use airspace for Waiheke would significantly improve the safety of helicopter operations.

"There needs to be a better airspace management tool for Waiheke. It's definitely time for the CAA to determine if they can make it safer. Currently, Waiheke's airspace is uncontrolled and as such, pilots aren't required to broadcast their location or to have a transponder."

But if a special use airspace for the island was approved, Haines says it could include a mandatory broadcast zone designation and a mandatory transponder requirement, both of which would enhance safety for those on the ground and in the sky.

"When you look at Waiheke, you have a large number of people wanting to establish a heliport, and they have every right to, but it gets to a stage where people are questioning if it is safe any more for everybody to do that. Just like if everyone built a garage at their entranceway on a small, narrow road, there would be safety concerns around cars, as increasingly there are safety concerns around helicopters.

"Eventually, it gets to a stage where there needs to be better planning and organisation around the number of heliports and secondly the organisation of airspace."

If a mandatory broadcast zone were established over Waiheke, pilots would be required to make radio calls at take-off and at times throughout the journey to inform others of their whereabouts, their path and their flight schedule.

"They would make a radio call before take-off to let other pilots know what they're doing and the same when coming in to land, and they would make appropriate radio calls in the area during the flight.

For example, a couple of miles out, they might call to say they're on approach to "x" heliport to let other pilots know. Currently, this is not required in Waiheke airspace,

although some professional pilots do broadcast updates regularly."

Another tool that could be utilised to improve the safety of Waiheke's airspace would be to make transponders mandatory, says Haines.

"They are usually mandatory in controlled airspaces, but because Waiheke is uncontrolled there might be some operators who don't have a transponder. Safety-wise they are designed to activate collision avoidance, but they are not as accurate below 2000 feet."



Mike Haines, who has worked for Christchurch International Airport, the Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand and Airways New Zealand, says that if a Special Use Airspace for the island was approved, it could include a mandatory broadcast zone designation and a mandatory transponder requirement, both of which would enhance safety for those on the ground and in the sky.

He says civil aviation rule part 157, which governs new aerodromes and heliports, should be reviewed.

Part 157 of the Ministry of Transport's civil aviation rules was written in the early 90s. Haines says very few amendments have been made since.

"Part 157 is out of date. I don't think the rules have kept up with the number of helicopters operating in New Zealand, or the ability for the Civil Aviation Authority to provide oversight."

Haines says he would like to see the aerodrome and heliport section reviewed

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and amended. He notes that it currently includes some arbitrary rules, which should be completely reworked.

"It says in there that the Civil Aviation Authority only has to be notified when a heliport is used for more than seven days in a 30-day period, but you could use it for three days and have 2000 movements per day and not need to notify the CAA. So it's not an effective tool, nor is it aligned with the current way that you would manage airspace. The current rules are a bit light-handed in enabling the Civil Aviation Authority to provide oversight and advice to councils to ensure heliports are operating correctly."

CAA investigations into aviation safety over Waiheke got under way in October last year after lobby group Quiet Sky Waiheke, with support from the Waiheke Local Board, filed an application for a Special Use Airspace (SUA).

However, the authority has not kept the lobby group updated on its progress, and Quiet Sky Waiheke member Kim Whitaker says the 50-strong group hasn't heard anything for months.

There are also concerns that the new Civil Aviation Bill currently making its way through Parliament could reduce the potential for the designation of a SUA to help regulate and control chopper movements over Waiheke unless its wording is reworked.

Auckland Central MP Chloe Swarbrick, Quiet Sky Waiheke and Waiheke Local Board chairperson Cath Handley told a meeting of the select committee last week that they want to see the language in the draft bill amended to again open up the potential for a Special Use Airspace over the island.

Meanwhile, when *Gulf News* asked the CAA this week for an update on its investigations into a Special Use Airspace for Waiheke, a spokesperson said they would look into it but wrote that if the SUA application is still being processed the CAA won't release any details or timings.

• Sophie Boladeras