

# Chopper clampdown decision delayed

Representatives of three local boards detailed their communities' experiences and concerns surrounding helicopter activities at Auckland Council's planning committee meeting last week.

But despite their hopes for some clear pathways toward changes to planning rules and regulations to curtail helicopter proliferation, the meeting ran well over time and a decision was deferred until next month.

On 5 May, the planning committee will reply to a council report prepared by the plans and places and resource consents departments that rebuffed several local board requests, such as the potential for updating helipad consent rules under the Hauraki Gulf Islands (HGI) plan, which the report says is too costly and time-consuming.

The report also says a request for a moratorium on any new helipads isn't legally viable, and it doesn't recommend taking the matter to the Environment Court for a determination on the way consent rules are currently interpreted, as the Waiheke Local Board requested.

Although there wasn't time for the committee to respond to the report last week, time was allocated for the three local board representatives to speak to committee members, including Mayor Phil Goff, about their chopper-related concerns.

First, Waitemata Local Board deputy chairperson Alexandra Bonham detailed helicopter emissions and said helicopter use doesn't align with the requirements of Auckland's Unitary plan or the council's commitment to tackling the climate crisis.

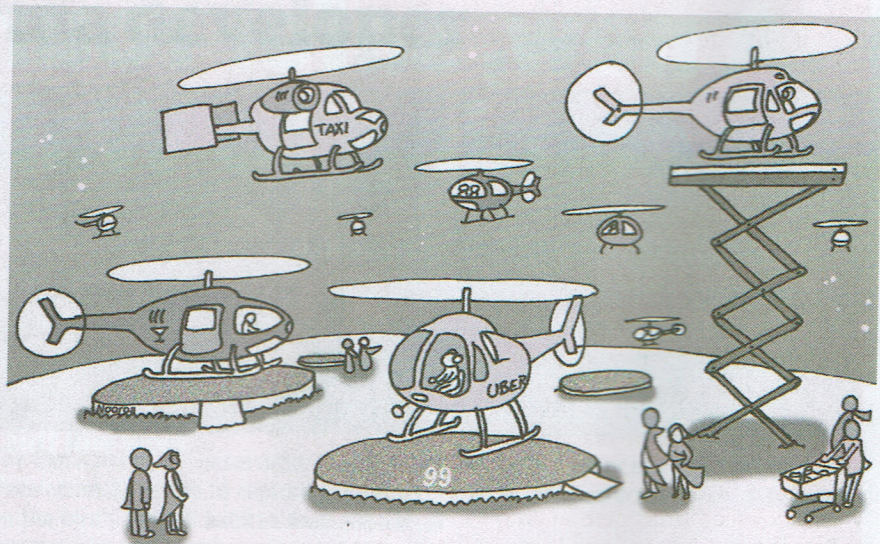
"Helicopters fly over the ocean and coastlines, disturbing wild species through air disruption and noise. The climate impacts are real; a helicopter travels 5.5 kilometres per litre of fuel compared to a hatchback, which gets you 25km," she said.

"Enabling helipads does not align with the objectives of the Auckland Unitary Plan, which currently requires us to maintain and enhance amenity values, the quality of the environment and to control noise emissions and mitigate the effects of noise."

Bonham also said she doesn't believe that council's complaints process is fit for purpose and recommended a review.

"We are told it is onerous and that many people see no point in bothering to complain about helicopters as nothing is done."

Izzy Fordham, chairperson of the Aotea Great Barrier local board, spoke after



Bonham and detailed her community's surprise as five requests for helipads came in over the space of five months.

"The board asked that each of the five recent helipad applications be fully publicly notified, but this has been declined every time."

Fordham said she believes the consenting process, under the Hauraki Gulf Islands district plan, favours the applicant.

"The issue lies within the current consenting process. Therefore, the only solution for Aotea is a plan change."

Fordham went on to say that the single proposed action within the report before the planning committee - for the council to undertake a six-month compliance investigation into helicopter operations - wouldn't benefit Aotea Great Barrier, where only two helipads have recently been approved.

According to the report, once the compliance investigation is complete, a report will be prepared for the planning committee providing an analysis of the results. At that time, the committee will again look into the potential for a plan change within the Hauraki Gulf Islands (HGI) district plan.

"With all due respect, that's no good for Aotea," said Fordham.

"What will the team be asking of us... we have no historical flight information as we only have two consents recently granted. The Environmental Defence Society also recommends a plan change, and this should be factored into the council's work programme on an urgent basis. I urge you to seek a plan change. Waiting another six months allows for more helipad applications and approvals."

Waiheke Local Board chairperson Cath Handley also spoke at the meeting and said that the board would like to see all

helipad resource consent applications publicly notified.

"This will enable other users of our airspace, such as the airfield and critical emergency services, as well as the community, environmental specialists and advocates, to contribute meaningfully."

"We have had two new helipad applications this week, we're at 50 so far, and 100 could be where we are before any real change happens. That's absurd, and it can't have been the intention of those creating the Hauraki Gulf Islands district plan."

The board chair went on to share a comment from Waiheke Airport co-owner Mark Jack, who said that the concentration of uncharted helipads is unique in New Zealand and that this poses a risk to air traffic and those living beneath. Jack also said that in the view of the airfield, no further helipads should be approved without public consultation.

Board chairperson Cath Handley told *Gulf News* following the meeting that the planning committee's deferral of their decision about how they might clamp down on helipad rules was disappointing after a long day. However, she understood that the committee had a packed agenda.

"This is really urgent for Waiheke and Aotea. The best outcome is for us to get what we're asking for: a declaratory judgement in the Environment Court would give an expert view on how rules are being currently interpreted by planners at council."

"We want expert independent review and insight, and each time we push the envelope, the rules do seem to be open up to a little more latitude, so I think this has been and will be worth our while." • Sophie Boladeras



# Five helipad applications put forward

New helipad applications are flying into council, with three lodged in the space of two weeks, and two others under consideration.

Of the three new applications, all lodged in March, two are for helipads on Orapiu Road and the third is for a helipad on Trig Hill Road.

Waiheke Local Board chairperson Cath Handley says she's concerned that the island, currently home to just over 50 helipads, will have double the number by the time planning rules for the Hauraki Gulf Islands are reviewed and updated in 2026.

"The public needs to be able to comment on all applications. Of these recent ones, two are adjacent to the marine reserve, and the other is on the flight path of the Waiheke airfield and very close to the Westpac rescue helicopter landing pad at Rangihoua.

"Neither of these operators will get to comment unless this is notified. The Westpac Rescue chopper is not even mentioned in the application."

The proposed helipad above Rangihoua and near Whakanewha Bay, on the vineyard-covered site at 150d Trig Hill Road, was lodged by Jomara Holdings Limited in March.

The helipad would be located at the end of an access lane crossing the vineyard and near a covenanted revegetation area.

No earthworks or construction is proposed or required for the helipad, and the application is primarily limited to considering potential helicopter noise effects.

Two flight paths are proposed. One would pass over the subject site and the Onetangi sports park, where the rescue chopper regularly lands.

The other would pass over the subject site and bush-clad areas of neighbouring sites towards the airfield.

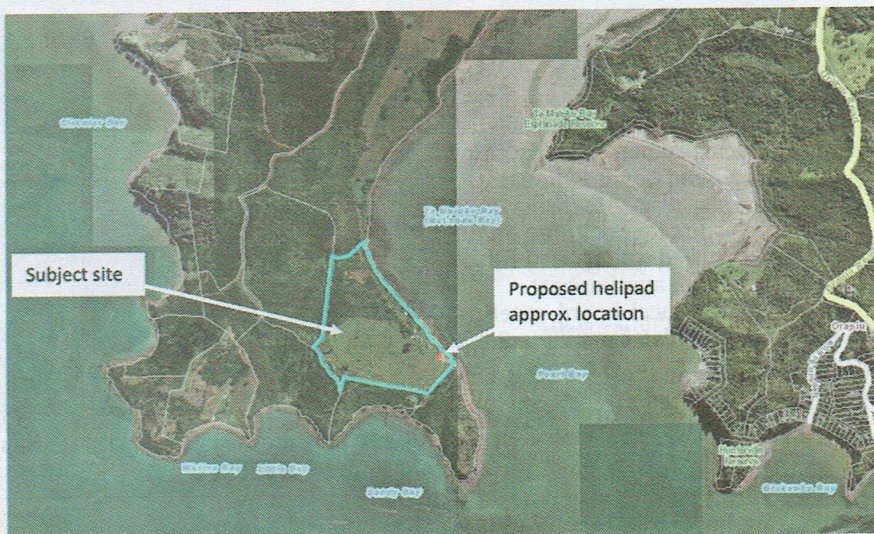
Quiet Sky Waiheke spokesperson Kim Whitaker says neither flight path makes sense to the lobby group.

"For a start, this is very close to the airfield where there is an existing possibility for people to land. Their proposed flight path also goes straight over the Westpac rescue helipad without any requirement to notify the emergency service. I'm sure they would want to be notified about this."

Up to eight single-engine helicopter movements are proposed over a three-day period, with a maximum of five movements allowed in a single day.

According to an acoustic report, the site will comply with the District Plan noise limit based on the number of helicopter movements.

It also says that cumulative effects are not likely "given the separation distance



Te Matuku Holdings has applied for a helipad on a substantial 18-hectare property by Te Matuku Bay. And right next door, another helipad has been requested by Jarvis Securities Limited at the 4-hectare property adjoining Sandy Bay.

between this site and the other aircraft operation areas".

Meanwhile, two further helipad resource consent applications were lodged in March for adjoining sites at 402b Orapiu Road, lot 8.

According to Open Corporates, the high-profile aviation, agribusiness and property investor Nicsha Faraci is a director of both the applicant companies, Jarvis Securities Limited and Te Matuku Holdings.

The first application, for Jarvis Securities Limited, requests a helipad on a 4-hectare oceanfront site bordering Sandy Bay.

The second, applied for by Te Matuku Holdings, is for a helipad on a substantial 18-hectare property by Te Matuku Bay.

Kim Whitaker of Quiet Sky Waiheke says the group is concerned about the proposed helicopter operations and flight paths.

"With regard to the two at Orapiu in terms of being near conservation land, this is concerning, and both are on similar, very narrow flight paths."

At the smaller 4-hectare site, the applicant proposes using an existing landing area, which has been in place for around 20 years for private helipad activity. No

construction or other works are proposed for the helipad.

Up to 12 helicopter movements per 3-day rolling average are proposed, with a single-day maximum of 8 movements.

Next door, at the massive 18-hectare property with the same address of 402b Orapiu Road (but with a different post-code), Te Matuku Holdings proposes a helipad at the south-eastern area of the site.

The acoustic report says that the applicant owns and operates a Sikorsky S-76 helicopter.

The S-76, a medium-sized commercial utility helicopter with twin turboshaft engines, is expected to be the primary helicopter used.

With this kind of aircraft, up to 12 helicopter movements over three days are proposed, with a single-day maximum of up to eight movements.

According to the application, any cumulative noise effects have been addressed, and overall movements have been limited to reduce cumulative noise in the area.

No earthworks or other physical works are required for the proposed helipad activity. • *Sophie Boladeras*

## Civil Aviation Authority to visit Waiheke

The director and the deputy chief executive officer of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will visit Waiheke next month to investigate the island's air traffic and helicopter operations.

The CAA will also meet with the local board and lobby group Quiet Sky Waiheke to hear input on helicopter

activity.

The meeting is due to take place on 5 May, the same day Auckland Council's planning committee is expected to decide on actions in response to Waiheke, Aotea and Waitematā local board concerns around helipad consents and chopper movements. •