'BVLOS' IS COMING READ YOUR NOTAMs!

Up until now, flying a drone has been allowed only if its operator or an observer could always see it, and the surrounding airspace, with their own eyes. But 'beyond visual line of sight' is coming.

Unmanned aircraft (UA) technology, including situational awareness tools, has come a long way since the introduction of Part 102 rules in 2015.

Today the CAA is assessing applications from certificated Part 102 participants for beyond visual line of sight – BVLOS – operations.

The UA operator wanting to undertake BVLOS operations will need multiple mitigations in place to do that. For example, where their craft can fly, in what airspace, how high, how it engages with other airspace users – and having a NOTAM or AIP Supplement published.

One of those applicants is the air logistics company, Swoop Aero. It wants to deliver medical supplies, and other vital goods, by UA around the country.

Its New Zealand general manager, Richard Adams, says applying for NOTAMs and AIP Supplements to be published will just be part of normal procedure.

"We want to integrate successfully with other aircraft and obviously airspace notifications will allow us to do that."

CAA's manager of the emerging technologies programme, Rebecca Langton, says engagement between traditional pilots and UA operators is a two-way street.

"UA operators will have to make sure they know about what other airspace users are doing and where – things like the local aero club having a fly-in – and traditional pilots will need to know the details of UA ops that could have an impact on their plans."

CAA team leader of Part 102 operations, Corey Price, says a traditional pilot carrying out thorough flight planning has probably never been more critical.

"They should be checking NOTAMs and AIP supps anyway. But with BVLOS operations increasingly possible on their route or at the destination aerodromes, it's essential they include this vital step in planning a safe flight."

// The not-for-profit research organisation, MAUI63, will use BVLOS to more comprehensively survey the ocean and collect data on the critically endangered Māui dolphin.

Photo courtesy of MAUI63.