



Recent issues concerning poor radio use by some agricultural pilots have *Vector* going back to the basics.

Radio use was highlighted in two recent aviation related concerns (ARCs) involving agricultural aircraft. One of these occurred at Tokoroa aerodrome between a Fletcher FU-24 and a Cessna 172. The C172 had to conduct a go-around despite making radio calls to the FU-24 it had in sight, but which wasn't responsive on the radio.

CAA's ARC investigator, Roger Shepherd, said the Fletcher pilot explained that when working near Tokoroa, he's found the number of calls other pilots make to be a distraction to his sowing work at times. So, he turns the radio volume down.

Roger says he's heard similar explanations from other agricultural pilots. But good radio use is a key part to keeping everyone safe. It's all about listening out, communicating, and making sure that you're on the right frequency.

Turn it on, and turn it up

While keeping a lookout is still the primary traffic avoidance tool, there's no use in a radio with its volume turned down, or worse, *off*.

The issue is possibly due to old habits in pilots who started out when it was normal for agricultural aircraft to not have radios fitted.

This is because they had been operating only in Class G uncontrolled airspace. However, with more agricultural aircraft based out of busy unattended aerodromes, and the increased mandating of radio use through MBZs, more agricultural aircraft are being equipped.

With radio equipment cheaper and lighter than 25 years ago, Roger thinks there's really no excuse for not having a radio – even if you are only ever operating in uncontrolled airspace.

"It's good airmanship to be listening out, and these days it's surprising what traffic is around in uncontrolled airspace," he says.

Communicate

CAA agricultural specialist, Gary Langman, says that some ag pilots tend to think the airspace they are in is their own.

"They don't expect someone else to pop up over the hill and look at them. But it does happen."

The second ARC involved two agricultural aircraft (fixed wing and rotary wing) operating in the same area. In transit, the fixed wing came close to the working helicopter, without warning.

Earlier, the fixed wing had been at an airstrip waiting for fog to clear. After departing the airstrip, the fixed wing pilot was still monitoring only their 'company frequency'. He hadn't communicated or heard any calls from other traffic on the local Class G frequency.

"Be aware of where you're operating and who is around you. If you can see or hear other operators around, try to make yourself known, and tell them where you are," recommends Gary.

Good radio use is becoming even more important with the growth in air traffic, especially from flying schools. If you're going to be operating in an area where it is common for training aircraft to be flying, be proactive and talk with the local training organisations before going out.

Keep radio calls concise and use standard phraseology. That will help keep radio clutter down, and reduce the likelihood of radio distraction for others.

Tune in

Tuning into the right frequency may seem obvious, but it's important to remember, when operating in Class G airspace, to listen out on the appropriate FISCOM frequency (see *AIP New Zealand* GEN 3.4) unless you are operating within an MBZ or CFZ.

Aerodromes without an air traffic service, that have their details published in *AIP New Zealand*, will always have a dedicated frequency listed in the COM box on the aerodrome chart. In some cases, this frequency will be 119.1 MHz, as it will be with most unpublished aerodromes. If any of the latter are located in an MBZ or CFZ, expect the unattended frequency to correspond with that of the airspace. At attended aerodromes, when ATS are off watch, the frequency remains the same as during the hours of watch.

For agricultural operators, often the focus is on monitoring the 'company frequency' for operational and safety reasons.

But when an aircraft isn't equipped with a radio that has multi-channel monitoring capabilities, it's even more critical to keep a good lookout for other traffic operating at low level, as seen in the ARC described earlier.

If you spot any traffic, change to the appropriate frequency to advise your whereabouts and intentions.

"Be aware of where you're operating and who is around you. If you can see or hear other operators around, try to make yourself known, and tell them where you are."

It's for everyone's benefit

Roger says that while agricultural operations are conducted under VFR, it's not that distracting to hear a radio call. Gary compares it to listening to a radio while driving a car.

Radio use comes down to common-sense airmanship, and keeping other pilots in the loop about what you're doing. While pilots' primary consideration must be to keep a lookout as part of maintaining situational awareness, good radio use is an important component of it too.

More information

For more information on radio use, see the *AvKiwi Plane Talking* e-learning, available at www.caa.govt.nz/avkiwi. This course also provides handy links to Advisory Circular AC91-9 *Radiotelephony Manual* and the GAP booklet *Plane Talking: A Guide to Good Radio Use*. ■

