



MEDIA STATEMENT *February 24, 2015*

CAA lifts flight ban on Helicopters

The Director of Civil Aviation, Graeme Harris has today withdrawn an Emergency Airworthiness Directive that last Saturday grounded all Robinson R44 series Helicopters fitted with a (C016-7) 'Dash 7' Main Rotor Blade (MRB).

The Directive was issued as a safety precaution following the fatal accident in the Lochy River basin near Queenstown on Thursday 19th February. It resulted from initial advice from the safety investigators at the scene of the accident that damage to the MRB was similar to the 23 January incident involving the partial failure of another R44 MRB. In that case the pilot experienced severe vibration but was able to land the aircraft safely.

Sections of the MRB from the aircraft that crashed in the Lochy River Basin were flown to Wellington for laboratory testing. That testing has established that while the location of the blade failure was similar to that of the blade involved in the 23 January incident, the mechanism of the failure was different.

'The blade retrieved from the Lochy River had failed due to overloading – probably due to impact damage.' Mr Harris said. It was highly likely that it was damaged during the accident sequence rather than being the failure that initiated the accident.'

'Now that we have established that the blade failure in the Lochy River basin was the consequence of the accident rather than its cause, I am satisfied the precautionary grounding of aircraft with the Dash 7 blade can be safely removed.' Mr Harris said

He has advised that the Continuing Airworthiness Notice, issued by the CAA calling for a pre-flight inspection of Dash 7 MRBs following the 23 January failure has been escalated to an Airworthiness Directive to make regular inspection of the rotor blades a mandatory requirement. (see attached) 'We don't want to see any complacency amongst operators as there is still a concern with these blades and we are waiting on test results from the USA before we review the Airworthiness notice.' He said

The blade involved in the first incident was still enroute to Robinson in the US for analysis by them and the Federal Aviation Administration. The CAA will closely monitor the results of the work in the US and consider its implications for the NZ R44 fleet.

"In these situations we have to be proactive – our primary concern is aviation safety – the public and industry expect nothing less.' Mr Harris said.

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