

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Civil Aviation Rules Proposed for Unmanned Aircraft

Industry and the public will soon get an opportunity to have their say on proposed Civil Aviation Rules for unmanned aircraft operations.

Commonly known as UAVs, drones or Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), most unmanned aircraft operations are currently regulated by rules designed for model aircraft.

Steve Moore, CAA General Manager – General Aviation, says most unmanned aircraft can fly much faster, further, and higher than traditional model aircraft.

The advanced performance characteristics of unmanned aircraft mean they can be used for a much wider range of applications including scientific research, film and video production and agriculture.

“This can mean greater safety risks for airspace users, and for people and property. It’s important we update the rules in recognition of those risks.

“Ultimately, users will need to abide by the new rules, so it is important they get the chance to have input into their development,” he says.

Recent advances in technology have led to significant growth in the number of unmanned aircraft operations, particularly RPAS, world-wide.

The proposed rules are part of the CAA’s strategy to integrate unmanned aircraft into the aviation system.

“It is important that we put in place a comprehensive regulatory framework that is flexible enough to accommodate further growth over the long-term.”

The proposed rules focus on the safety risks associated with high performance unmanned aircraft, with operators of high risk unmanned aircraft likely to require CAA certification. Initial consultation in developing the rules has involved users, including industry group UAVNZ, and Callaghan Innovation.

“We are aware that these operations are opening up significant business opportunities in areas like real estate, film and television, and scientific research.

“We want to make sure the new rules do not impose an undue regulatory burden on operators and will seek feedback on this and other aspects during the consultation period,” says Steve Moore.

“We want to make sure that recreational users can still operate in a low-risk environment, and will modify the existing rules so they can continue to do this where appropriate,” he says.

Unmanned aircraft can be purchased from retail outlets and also online for a few hundred dollars. In some cases users may not be aware they are subject to the Civil Aviation Rules, he says.

“The CAA encourages anyone who wants to operate an unmanned aircraft to find out what their safety obligations are before they fly.”

The CAA’s Notice of Proposed Rule Making will be issued on 4 December 2014. Members of the public and industry can give feedback until 30 January 2015 through the CAA web site: www.caa.govt.nz/rpas.

Notes for editors:

- The exact number of unmanned aircraft operations in New Zealand is unknown but small compared to conventional aircraft.
- The Civil Aviation Authority currently receives up to 50 enquiries a week relating to unmanned aircraft. This compares to around 20-30 enquiries weekly at the beginning of this year, and the CAA says the number is likely to increase with the growing popularity of unmanned aircraft.
- The number of aviation incidents involving unmanned aircraft has grown steadily since 2010.
- Already there have been 15 incidents reported to the CAA in 2014, compared to one incident reported in 2010 and more than the previous record of 12 incidents reported in both 2012 and 2013.
- Operation in breach of the Civil Aviation Rules could lead to a fine, a written warning, or prosecution by the CAA.
- The current rules for operating unmanned aircraft can be found on the CAA web site, www.caa.govt.nz/rpas.
- The CAA has collaborated with Airways New Zealand, Callaghan Innovation and UAVNZ on www.airshare.co.nz, an online hub to help UAV operators learn how to operate safely.
- Shared Skies, the first ever unmanned aircraft industry event, will be held in Masterton on 16 January 2015.

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