

# Pilots are railing at big fees hike

## Pilots 'Seriously Unimpressed'

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Last updated 12:00 17/10/2012

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NZ Pilots Ali Atayee (left), Mitchell Watson, Mike Dwyer, and Greg McGhie.

Pilots facing increased regulatory costs are gearing up to revolt against soaring Civil Aviation Authority fees, with some taking to social media to vent their frustration.

The New Zealand Airline Pilots Association has confirmed it is to launch an appeal against the Government-run CAA's new fees and charges, which were largely unchanged for the past 18 years.

Pilots are railing against increases of up to 300 per cent for licensing fees and a controversial new medical certificate application fee, due to come into effect on November 1.

A Facebook page entitled "CAA - Seriously Unimpressed" had yesterday gathered almost 400 "likes" within 48 hours of being set up.

NZAPA president Glen Kenny said pilots had not been adequately consulted. "To go from zero to \$320 for a medical certificate is not at all acceptable," Mr Kenny said. "We suspect it is cross-subsidising a whole raft of other Civil Aviation Authority activities which is hardly in the spirit of 'user-pays'."

CAA said decisions around fees had been aided by a reference group that included Air New Zealand, the Airways Corporation, the Board of Airline Representatives of New Zealand, the Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand, the New Zealand Airports Association, and the New Zealand Aviation Federation.

Transport Minister Gerry Brownlee said earlier this year that the old framework did not meet the costs of the CAA. People who chose to fly, or to operate airlines and aircraft, should meet the full cost of regulations. He predicted the new fees would recover about \$14.1 million a year.

However, a summary document from the 2010 consultation shows aviation sector leaders were concerned the CAA's multimillion-dollar relocation into a different building was unnecessary and a "principal catalyst" for the review. They also noted the \$313 medical application fee - an annual or twice-yearly requirement for pilots depending on their age and employer - does not include the cost of the certification itself.

Massey University's School of Aviation professional programmes manager Frank Sharp said trainee pilots would be among those hit hardest. Graduates with six-figure student loans would enter a job market with high regulatory costs barely offset by entry-level salaries of between \$20,000 and \$35,000, he said.

Massey second-year aviation student Mike Dwyer said the new fees were unaffordable.

"I think it's pretty ridiculous to put all that pressure on pilots who are making the same salary as someone working at McDonald's."

An air traffic trainee licence, which cost \$51.11, will cost \$197 and a new licence registration that cost a about \$25 will also cost \$197.

Trainee flight instructor Mitchell Watson said young pilots who did not fly for commercial airlines would have to keep up with the licensing fees themselves.

Christchurch-based International Aviation Academy of New Zealand graduate James Odgers feared high fees would deter budding pilots from training. "It's keeping it a rich man's sport."