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## Official Newsletter of the NZ Agricultural Aviation Association – Nov 2013

The spring from hell continues as NZ gets pounded by the angry systems crossing the Tasman - all making for an unhappy life for the hapless Ag Pilot. Although the last week has provided some windows.

In this newsletter read about:

- From the Chair
- Regional Meetings
- Assurance
- So why the surprise?
- Farmers have their say
- Last Word

### From the Chair

Another month, another inspection - it seems most operators are very busy with the Spring presenting itself in all its glory. Spring also tends to be a good time to review your prices, as things can creep up on you in the winter, resulting in a reluctance to review pricing when things are slow. Catch my drift??

Your AAA committee has been pretty active over the last month, with lots of info and decisions being exchanged via email - it certainly is the way to keep in touch.

My own travels have seen me back into the Wairarapa to “present” an AIRCARE™ certificate to Alix and Janine at Tararua Helicopters, with appropriate press coverage, as well as give a talk to a Co-op on the ever changing compliance environment out there. An article is also about to be written by a local reporter involving AAA members in the Pahiatua/Dannevirke area about the “**Down To The Wire**” programme and we should see this publicity in the next week. A similar programme is planned for the Southern Wairarapa area, with similar coverage for the local guys. It is very heartening for me to see you people come on board with this, as the local farmers in your area relate far better to you, than to an outsider. Watch out South Island, Tony Michelle is attempting to get a group together down there and I will liaise with him to pay a visit. My next foray is through the Waikato, BOP, and down to Gisborne, with local members co-ordinating this for me. A big thanks to you.

In my travels, *still* the biggest topic out there ???....you guessed it. *Pricing and Sustainability*. It seems in some areas, there is *still* a fair bit of predatory pricing going on, and there is nothing we as a Committee can do about this, except to sing in harmony at your Company’s

funeral service when you go broke. Price fixing by law is an offence, but hey, some of you guys should really look at how you are going to survive **long term** with the pricing regime you are following. At the Co-op meeting I was asked the secret to survival, and my reply was to have enough in the kitty to replace and repair. Recently an operator sent me a copy of all the extras involved with a spraying helicopter versus a passenger helicopter; spray gear, GPS, loading equipment, loading vehicle(s), loader driver, experienced Ag Pilot, Chemical Rating, Growsafe, DG, etc , and figured he needed at least a dollar a litre (400 litre load = \$400) to make money. I think he is on the mark, although we charge much more than that on smaller jobs.....

Regarding AIRCARE™, there is an expression of interest for spraying work circulating. The Client has heard about AIRCARE™, and is stipulating AIRCARE™ accreditation as a prerequisite to tender. All I can add is that in talking to them, they didn't bat an eyelid in requesting Industry recognized best practice, as they are in a situation where they need, and will pay for, the best. The beauty of a programme like AIRCARE™ is that as it evolves, we can tweak and change it to better reflect operators, and operations.

Keep it safe out there, and let's remember Penny's message....

Alan Beck  
NZAAA Chair

### The Regional Meetings

It certainly was a busy month in October as we ran 15 meetings throughout NZ as part of the Sustainable Farming Fund Project, "Environmental Best Practice in Agricultural and associated Rural Aviation." The purpose of this round of meetings was to present the Guidance Note and the associated Technical Information. These two documents were developed as a response to the issues pilots, regulators and stakeholders raised at the first round of Regional Meetings. The project itself is a response to the workshop we ran at the 2010 NZAAA Conference where the theme was "Doing Nothing is Not an Option." Most of you were at that workshop and participated. Funnily enough many of the issues you raised there were also identified at the first round of Regional Meetings although it was really interesting to hear the same issues being repeated by regional regulators. Those issues were:

- Fertiliser placement and land contamination
- Avoiding discharges to water, including definition of "waterway"
- Managing spray drift, including notification
- Client facilities
- The 1080 debate
- Lifestyle blocks
- Noise
- Consistency between councils & complexity of rules
- Media (perception vs reality)

Whilst the topic of Client Facilities has been tackled separately, the other threats to the future have been addressed by the Guidance Note and the associated Technical Information. So the purpose of the meetings was to gauge support for a risk based approach and get feedback on these documents. If you haven't had a look you can find them at

[https://secure.zeald.com/aianz/Divisions/NZAAA/Member/%20Presentations%20for%20upcoming%20regional%20meetings?mv\\_pc=1344](https://secure.zeald.com/aianz/Divisions/NZAAA/Member/%20Presentations%20for%20upcoming%20regional%20meetings?mv_pc=1344)

Whilst the Guidance Note is written in "RMA Speak" for regulators the Technical Information has been written for pilots and should offer considerable help.

The approach to addressing the issues has been to develop and encourage risk-based rules for Councils. This approach encourages councils to get rid of the prescriptive rules that dominate their plans and cause you so much angst. This approach was endorsed by NZAAA Committee back in February this year. Put simply, what this approach means is that instead of a council plan saying you can't spread fertiliser within 15 meters of a waterbody (at least one does) the plan will say, don't spread fertiliser into water – because that is what they mean. So a risk based rule is *outcome* focused. It leaves the decision making to you – after you've assessed the risks.

Now here's the thing. Go and have a look at the documents and see if they promote anything different to what you are doing now! Reality is that pilots have been using a risk based approach for years. So there is nothing new about what the project is promoting – from your point of view. If you see anything in the Technical Information you think is wrong or unhelpful then please get back to us by the end of this month so it can be addressed. The Guidance Note has already been peer reviewed by MfE.

### Assurance

Hand in hand with risk based rules goes the need for task verification and a QA programme that can be used to demonstrate you're always doing things correctly. The former means that you need to keep appropriate records (nothing new there) and the latter means you need to have an independently assured (audited) management system – and you know AIRCARE™ fills that requirement. That doesn't mean that there won't be other programmes; there may well be, (the fact is an alternative might be a very good thing) but at the moment AIRCARE™ is the only player. But be very clear that when regulators prescribe risk based rules, they are making a huge leap in faith that you actually know what you are doing and are doing it. Programmes such as AIRCARE™ give them that confidence. By the way, what is the difference between certification and accreditation? Think about this in the GROWSAFE® context.

- Your GROWSAFE® certificate shows you know what to do.
- AIRCARE™ Accreditation shows you are doing it

Operating in a risk based environment means that you have different risks to manage when you are say, spraying brushweeds in the South Island High Country as opposed to spraying them around lifestyles/vineyards/organic properties or public areas. The information you need to record will be quite different in each scenario. Possibly the only risk in the High

Country is introducing chemical to water but in the other situations there will be multiple risks. You need to manage these risks and record them so that:

- 1) Adverse effects are avoided (The Technical Information is all about management tools you can use to avoid adverse effects)
- 2) You can defend yourself by providing task verification (proof of what you did). This may mean using smoke –and it may mean filming it. But however you do it; just writing down that the wind is 5kts easterly may not be sufficient in some circumstances – depending on the risks. At one Regional Meeting we heard about a helicopter operator who runs a helmet cam and looks out the door and films the fall of fertiliser when he's doing sensitive boundaries. Hey, the technology is there and it's not too expensive.

### So why the surprise?

More and more often we are hearing of grizzles from lifestylers as well as others about aerial topdressing. Apparently one complained recently when a topdresser appeared next door at 8am on a Saturday morning. Well hell.

There are three ways to handle such complaints:

- 1) Tell the complainant to take a long walk to some fresh water and jump in on arrival. We're not breaking the law after all and everyone knows that most lifestylers should have stayed in town. Right?
- 2) We could take the advice that sits in the AIRCARE™ Noise Abatement Code. That code doesn't make aircraft quiet but it prescribes how their noise footprint can be reduced. The code says: *When carrying out low level operations pilots shall give consideration to things they can do to manage their noise footprint. Some examples are operating RPM, repetitive track placement (e.g. keeping high ground or shelter belts between their tracks and any nearby residence when this is possible) hours of operation and timing of operation. If operations are required adjacent to a populous area then the impact of noise will be less during the working week than at the weekend when workers are more likely to be at home.* Now we all know that Murphy is alive and well and in a spring like this one the one day a week the wind stops is bound to be in a weekend, right? - and repetitive track placement is also a challenge for topdressers. So?
- 3) Try notifying the neighbours. Sure this has been the domain of just the sprayers but it seems to me that much of the fuss that is made is made by people who are SURPRISED. That is one element of the whole equation that you can get rid of yourself. Now NZAAA is not saying *you* should notify all neighbours but what we are saying is that if there's likely to be trouble then you the pilot should ensure they are notified. The landowner is the logical person to carry out this notification because he knows who his neighbours are and you may not.

Now here's a test. Which options above offer the best and most enduring outcome? All incorrect answers will be treated to many lost hours dealing with irate complainants!

You know how we often talk about change and how change is the only constant? People's attitude to noise has changed. Further evidence is found in the number of noise complaints made during the recent Guy Fawkes celebrations. Did anyone complain when you were a kid.....?

But wait there's more

So just exactly how do you notify when you are spraying near a road and you can't notify motorists the day before? Let's face it the surprise element of low flying aircraft can be even more hazardous to car drivers than lifestylers. Signs like the one below do the trick followed by another saying for example, *helicopter spraying herbicide*.



Toolbox

To protect your butt and to be able to provide some evidence of accountabilities if you are called upon to do so, NZAAA strongly recommends that you have a form like the one following that you get the client to sign off on every job. It can easily be made to fit on your DFR as seen in the example at:

<http://www.aia.org.nz/AIRCARE/AIRCARE+Resources/Resources+for+NZAAA.html>

*Please tick the appropriate boxes to acknowledge that you have:*

- Identified hazards to Ground Crew
- Received a safety briefing
- Identified hazards to the pilot
- Identified application/work area(s)
- Identified sensitive boundaries/adjacent areas
- Discussed chemical requirements
- Notified affected neighbours
- Obtained any necessary consents/permits

Landowner Name.....

Signature.....

### Farmers have their say

Federated Farmers were invited to have a rep at each of the Regional Meetings and at one meeting the conversation had got around to notification and hazards. The farmer present made what I thought was a very valid point. He asked that when we ask farmers if they have notified neighbours and what hazards they have we should expand the question to detail exactly what we want to know.

- Have you notified ALL of your neighbours
- Can you be certain there are no stock on the strip
- Where are all your overhead wires e.g. electric fence wires, TV aerials, telephone lines, power lines, flying fox cables
- Are there any sensitive areas nearby e.g. crops, public areas, organic properties, etc.

Old Mate made the point that what are hazards to us are not hazards to him at all so he needs to be jogged about them. In our mail outs to farmers we have promoted the idea that farmers should compile a list of hazards for pilots and bring them out on the day rather than try and remember them all in the excitement of noise, dust and commotion – that we're pretty good at creating. So when you're talking to farmers how about suggesting that they develop such a list.

### Illustrious ex Leader



Many of you have been asking how Ken MacKenzie has been getting on since his stroke nearly a year ago. This recent pic shows Ken alive, well and making great improvement. Rumour has it that if you want your lawns mown, Ken's your man!

#### Last Word

If everybody always operates to best practice then we, both as individuals and as an industry, will have an assured future.

As always, send any feedback to [sinclairig@gmail.com](mailto:sinclairig@gmail.com)



*When things go bad, stop,  
take 5 paces back and  
reassesses for 5 minutes*