

A general view of the trades display area at the Dunedin venue. An important feature of this week.

Setting off from Masterton early on the morning of Sunday 16 June with rain and very poor visibility, I had reservations about flying to Dunedin that afternoon from Wellington and my doubts were well founded. Several connecting flights from other parts of the North Island were delayed or cancelled causing changes of flying arrangements for quite a few delegates. Although experiencing a slight delay, our Boeing 737 arrived at Dunedin to a very cold and wet evening and we all proceeded to the city centre and our hotels ready for another very interesting aviation week.

With Aviation Industry Association CEO Irene King stressing that the Conference this year would be based around the two themes of "Aviation is in our DNA" and "One Industry, One Voice" plus an emphasis on 'safety and growth' was set to be a great eye opener of new developments in the Industry. With well over 300 delegates registered for the week it was great to meet up with many familiar faces from previous years, plus visitors from around the world: Australia, America, UK, Far East, India and even Egypt. When else in the NZ calendar year would so many of the key management and 'grass roots' people in the complete aviation industry be gathered together to discuss progress, problems and innovations?

Monday

Monday morning and a brisk walk to Dunedin Town Hall, a superb structure, ideally suited for the Conference with ample session rooms plus a magnificent main hall for the Trades Display area. The Town Hall had been totally refurbished throughout during the past couple of years and was in pristine condition.

As with the last couple of Conferences, the first two days were orientated towards the NZ Agricultural Aviation Association (NZAAA) with the remainder of the week for Aviation Industry Association of NZ (AIA NZ) with streams for the other various sub divisions of New Zealand Helicopter Association (NZHA), Aircraft Engineering Association of NZ (AEANZ), Flight Training and Air Transport / Tourism, Flight Operations.

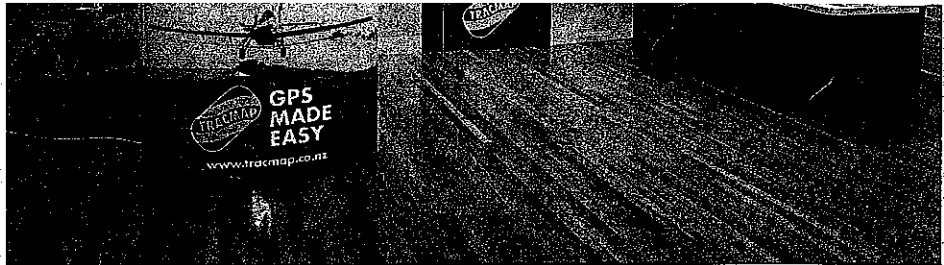
With up to four topic streams in operation at any one time, I tried to cover the main topics and apologise to anybody now if I have not covered their particular area: I started the morning with a tour of the trades area, great stands, great displays and lots of interested delegates viewing the aviation products available.

I also visited two delegate sessions before lunch, then it was time for Conference MC Greg Ward, entertainer extraordinaire and the Conference MC for quite a few years, to introduce the opening address and presentation by Jacqueline Rowarth, Professor of Agribusiness at Waikato University.

It was a very interesting talk on how we feed the world's seven billion people.

Comparing NZ and its food production with the rest of the world, we rate quite highly. But, with the figures shown, and with a drop in beef and sheep numbers, we must focus on continuing our output growth in this area plus boost our dairy and forestry industry; there is no room for slackness. The great opening address by Jacqueline raised many points which were revisited during the week. Following on was a brief welcoming opening address by NZAAA President Graeme Martin before delegates were further informed of NZ's position in the agriculture market by Andrew Morrison of Federated Farmers. Again, he stressed that farmers must have confidence in investing in the future to maintain the viability of the meat industry and water management. Pollution of our waterways is a major no-no. The same topic was continued by Rob Davison of Beef and Lamb NZ.

Two points that were mentioned during the morning were to me of great interest. Firstly the change in our export figures: China is slowly increasing its usage compared to a decline or static figures for UK and USA. The second point was how well we are utilising our stock, with all export figures up on reduced national stock figures. An example was sheep, with total production figures down only 7%, despite a reduction in national stock of 46% - great figures indeed and a credit to farmers. The final talk before afternoon tea was by Gordon Anderson of SafeSTART. With the help of videos



The Tracmap stand promoting the use of GPS based aircraft tracking systems.

he involved delegates in exercises on how accidents happen and how to prevent them. Lots of fun but some sobering moments. A valid comment he made was that a lot of the delegates were there because of luck, not by being safety conscious. How true that is with all of us! Following afternoon tea, Gordon continued with a delegate workshop session which is part of his company's one day Safety Course. He concluded the day's sessions with delegates themselves recalling to the group accidents they had experienced during their lives that had been challenging. Some them were great and scary experiences.

Our first social evening at Dunedin was spent at the Scenic Southern Cross. The evening was sponsored by Pratt and Whitney Canada and their representative Russell Whitmarsh welcomed delegates and partners to the evening. Being joined to the Dunedin Casino, delegates had a chance to try out their hand at gambling tables with a couple of free chips and some beautiful Casino ladies before retiring to the meal area and a wonderful meal and entertainment. Eco 2000 sponsored a great Samsung digital camera raffle, which was won by Rick Graham of Shoreline Helicopters and his wife. Chocolate fish for errors during the year were given out and two birthdays recognised. Russell Baker of Fiordland Aero Maintenance introduced a Scottish influence to the evening resplendent in tartan kilt (very much part of the week with Dunedin being the Edinburgh of the South). MC Greg entertained with guitar and singing to a mesmerised audience.

Tuesday

My first session of the day was with the fixed wing stream. First speaker was Andrew Hogarth with a very interesting talk on flight safety, especially when turning at a low altitude. With the help of videos Andrew explained the dangers of quick turning and the stall/no lift characteristics of wings. Next up was Damien Camp of Pacific Aerospace Corporation (PAC). With the aging fleet of Fletcher and Cresco aircraft making up a large proportion of top dressing aircraft in NZ, Damien stressed that PAC is dedicated to continue producing spare parts for the

aircraft it has manufactured. The company is financially sound with no fear of collapse. There were lots of questions from the floor concerning spares etc., all of which were answered positively by Damien.

John Wylie of Flightcell then talked of the move towards paperless cockpits, and how the new Flightcell DZMX sitcom tracking communication system unit produced by his company went a long way in achieving this concept. All load weight details, take offs, time, area sown, weight sown and area covered etc. were recorded and transmitted by satellite or cellular means to Tracplus soft-ware. Bruce Petersen of Aerospread followed up with how that information was paperless stored using Aeronet. This was a very interesting session with an insight into how modern top dressing techniques are changing.

Following morning tea, Angela Beazer of AMC Legal talked to the same group of delegates on the legal requirements of employee/employer in the workplace environment. Angela talked in particular about two disasters: firstly 'Easy Rider', a fishing vessel that sunk in Foveaux Strait in 2012 with the loss of eight persons; and secondly the Pike River mining disaster. Safety factors in both circumstances were discussed, and with Pike River she talked of the possibility of introducing corporate manslaughter charges. She also mentioned that with the CAA and SMS initiatives at present underway all aspects of present health and safety systems and processes should be incorporated.

John Sinclair, NZAAA Executive Officer, then took to the floor and gave an excellent talk on risk based regulation. He gave examples of how red tape can overcomplicate quite reasonable risks, with some interesting examples including a Blenheim war memorial that had fences round it as an earthquake risk (it was only a small stone tower), and an aircraft hangar also in Blenheim that had to have fire doors fitted as local rules required a fire escape door every 20 metres on each side if used as a workshop. John stressed that the NZAAA strongly promoted a return to common sense with risk based regulation, especially as this was very relevant for aerial spraying. The pilot is aware of the risks and





Keeping with Southern tradition, at the awards dinner, the haggis was piped in, then toasted.

his skill, knowledge, and safety and quality assurance training puts him in a good position to assess any unsafe situations. Also stressed by John was the variation in rule regulation from region to region throughout NZ.

Greg Delaney of Ballance agri-nutrients, following in the path of previous speakers, stressed the importance of promoting safety by maintaining safety standards, proper training and good decision making by staff. Greg then gave an update of Ballance, its continuing drive to remain competitive with pricing and its take-over of the Altum fertiliser brand. Ballance would continue to supply a good product and while sometimes regular phosphate supply could be a problem, his company's supplies were adequate. He added that with farms utilising more uphill areas this could indicate an increase in top dressing opportunities.

At lunch, Dale Webb, AIA President, introduced Chris Staynes, Deputy Mayor of Dunedin, to the delegates. Chris welcomed everybody to Dunedin and the venue. He talked of how proud Dunedin was of its recently upgraded town hall and the wonderful facilities the city and its surroundings had to offer: the royal albatross colony, penguins, seals and other marine animals; its new covered rugby stadium; and the many places around the city open to visitors, to name a few.

Following lunch I attended a short but very moving session. Mike Mehrtens was killed when the helicopter he was flying crashed into Lake Sumner in May 2012. A year to the day after his funeral his wife, Penny, talked to delegates of the safety issues that a wife must maintain, of how important it is for a wife to make sure her husband is well fed and not tired before going to work; and also the importance of having a will and insurance, and very much working as a team. A very brave woman to stand and talk to the group. I along with everybody else admired her resolve.

The next session I attended again covered Ag Aviation: Sector Risk Profile. First speakers were Jack Stanton and Steve Kern of CAA. They informed the delegates of CAA's risk based approach to safety legislation that is steered in this direction by ICAO's State Safety Programme. The aim is to define and

collate Ag Aviation risks using industry interaction (industry, pilots, and farmers), workshops, surveys, site visits, audit funding, safety reports etc. to collate and identify common themes. From this information it is hoped that a risk profile can be sourced. An SMS scheme will cost money, but all speakers thought it was a marketable tool. 'Aircare' and SMS should be for the whole industry and the report on SRP was expected to be completed by the end of July. NZAAA are co-sponsors of the SRP scheme, and Graeme Martin NZAAA, Heather Fitzpatrick of Aero-safe Risk Management and Graeme Harris, Director Civil Aviation, joined a question and answer session. Then delegates split into 16 groups with each group debating one of the 16 key risk themes that had previously been recognised as sector wide. Five covered fixed wing and three helicopter, with airstrip conditions, overloading, and inconsistent operational standards, to name three. A very heady but highly constructive session which more than justified the time spent.



Penny Mehrtens addresses the conference.



Dressed in their finest, the NZAAA committee enjoyed the award night function.

Afternoon tea in the Trades area and it was time for the Best Exhibitor Display Award to be presented, this year with NZAAA Chairman Graeme Martin presenting the trophy to James O'Brian of AIRTRACTOR.

The workshop/debate session continued after tea followed by the NZAAA AGM.

Tuesday's evening function, sponsored by GE Capital, was held at the town hall with a very Scottish theme. Delegates and partners were greeted and led into the meal area by two bagpipe players. Then came a 'Toast the Haggis' presentation with conference delegates Hugh Marshall (haggis speaker), Don McCracken (haggis guard), Adrian McChardy (haggis carrier) and Bruce Robinson (whisky carrier) on stage. Next up was a NZAAA Award presentation to Bob Cleland for outstanding service. This was followed by a very interesting talk by guest speaker and farmer, Graham Williams. Then delegates and partners enjoyed a great meal and friendship.

With the NZAAA part of the conference week finished except for some closed Inci-

dent Review Meetings on Wednesday morning, it is time for me to sum up the past two days. Safety and Growth were targeted at the start of the week. Risk Profile as opposed to Rule Profile certainly seemed the way to go to give the Industry a long term positive goal. Overall, in my view delegates were confident about the future and the new safety legislation that is in the pipeline, with both CAA and the ag Industry following similar lines.

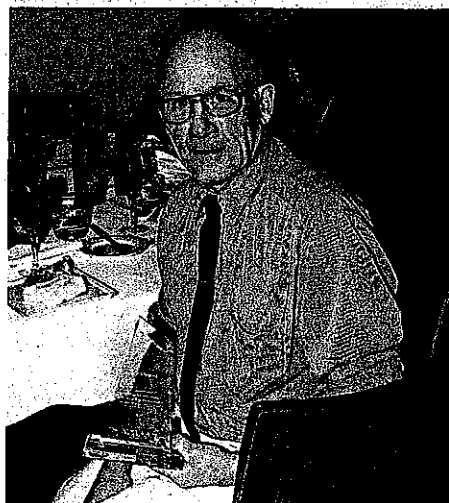
To be continued . . .



The best exhibitor award for 2013 went to James O'Brian of AIRTRACTOR



Russell Whitman of Pratt and Whitney Canada, sponsors of the Tuesday evening function, welcomes delegates and their partners to the function



Bob Cleland received the award for outstanding service to the NZAAA