



Environmental best practice in agricultural and associated rural aviation

Regional meeting report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between July and October 2011, 16 regional meetings were held as a key part of the initial stage of the “Environmental best practice in agricultural and associated rural aviation” project.

Attendees at the meeting included pilots and operators, council representatives and interested rural and stakeholder organisations.

The meetings provided an opportunity to outline the project, propose outcomes and components and sought feedback on these. They included:

- **Guidance Note:** While the concept of the Guidance Note was new to many meeting attendees, there was general endorsement and support for the development of a Guidance Note which quantifies best environmental practice for rural aviation.
- **AIRCARE:** Similarly, as the AIRCARE programme is relatively new there was considerable discussion and interest in the programme.

Attendees were invited to discuss the environmental issues being faced by the rural aviation industry. A number of issues were raised, particularly:

- the unrealistic expectations and subsequent complaints from “lifestylers”
- public perceptions about aerial activity often being out of line with reality and leading to an oversensitivity in the community
- the need for a common definition and understanding across all councils in regards to waterways/water bodies, buffer zones, distance setback and sensitive areas
- the need for clarification for pilots/operators and clients/farmers as to where the onus of responsibility for notification falls
- fertiliser physical qualities
- client facilities, such as airstrips, bins and safety issues.

Suggestions for improving these issues in the future focused strongly on education, closer involvement with council to achieve clearer council regulations, and guidelines for those involved in the industry.

A theme which emerged strongly through all meetings was the importance of communication, information and education of a wide range of stakeholders to improve understanding of the rural aviation industry. A number of initiatives suggested were wider than originally anticipated in the project but will be explored as being valuable contributions to the project.

CONTENTS

1. Purpose	p4
2. Background	p4
3. Project process and outcomes	p5
4. Issues raised	p7
4.1 “Lifestylers”	p7
4.2 Public perception	p8
4.3 Regulations around waterways/water bodies	p9
4.4 Notification	p10
4.5 Product	p10
4.6 Client facilities	p11
4.7 Other issues (general)	p11
4.8 What’s working well (general)?	p11
4.9 What’s needed for things to work better in the future (general)?	p12
5. Assessment of meetings	p13

1. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the key points gathered through the discussion with operators, regulators and stakeholders at the 16 regional meetings held between July and October 2011 as Milestone 7 of the “Environmental best practice in agricultural and associated rural aviation” project.

2. BACKGROUND

A key part of the project at this initial stage has been engagement and extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders, operators and council staff in relation to good agricultural aviation practice and the requirements under the RMA.

16 regional meetings were held during July – October 2011. These meetings were designed to encourage attendees to get involved in the project at a very early stage and identify issues relating to aviation, areas that are currently working well and possible solutions for the future.

Regional meetings were held in:

Northland	6 October
Auckland	5 October
Waikato	4 October
Gisborne	28 July
Hawkes Bay	27 July
Taranaki	2 August
Bay of Plenty (Rotorua)	3 October
Manawatu/Wanganui	3 August
Wellington/Wairarapa	4 August
Blenheim	20 July
Nelson/Tasman	21 July
West Coast	21 September
Canterbury (Rangiora)	22 September
Otago (Mosgiel)	11 October
Queenstown	13 October
Southland	12 October

Meetings were facilitated by Lynette Wharfe, The AgriBusiness Group and John Sinclair, Executive Officer NZ Helicopter Association and NZ Agricultural Aviation Association. Some meetings were also attended by John Maber, Project Manager.

3. PROJECT PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

A presentation was used as a basis for the meetings which outlined the project, proposed outcomes and components and sought feedback on these. They included:

- Guidance Note
- Demonstration days
- AIRCARE
- Information for councils, operators and stakeholders

Guidance Note

While the concept of the Guidance Note was new to many meeting attendees, particularly the pilots and operators, there was general endorsement and support for the development of a Guidance Note which quantifies best environment practice for rural aviation, especially if it could be put on the Quality Planning website. Council participants acknowledged that they regularly use the Quality Planning website and would find an aviation specific guidance note of value to them.

A number of participants suggested that a National Environmental Standard (NES) may be a more appropriate tool as it would lead to greater consistency across the country through regulation. It was acknowledged that an NES may be a useful tool but that the Guidance Note was seen as a stepping stone that could eventually lead to a request to the Government to develop an NES for aviation activities.

Comments included:

- It was good to get an understanding of where the Guidance Note is expected to fit.
- Good to know that there is a national guidance framework being developed.
- Consider using National Environmental Standard to get consistency across regions.
- It was valuable hearing about the plans for a best practice Guidance Note.
- Best practice leads to an expectation that all practice will be undertaken to the absolute best way of doing it and with the variable available; the outcome becomes a standardised lower level.
- Good potential system to help improve/promote best practice and, in turn, compliance.
- Guidance Note would be a positive way of addressing issues from a regulators perspective.

Demonstration days

The concept of the demonstration days was generally supported, with the location and timing being the main factors for consideration. Linking with the NZ Planning Institute Conference was seen as a positive initiative.

AIRCARE™

The AIRCARE™ programme and the linkages to the project outcomes were outlined. As it is a relatively new accreditation programme there was considerable discussion about the programme itself. Council participants were interested in how the programme could be linked into Regional and District Plans. A number of stakeholders identified that it could be linked into other industry QA programmes, such as Sustainable Winegrowing and Forestry Sustainability Certification, and also as a requirement in contracts (e.g. AHB, Landcorp) Pilots and operators were seeking further information on the programme and the process to achieve accreditation.

Comments included:

- Meeting reinforced the value of AIRCARE.
- I now have a greater understanding of the role that AIRCARE is going to play in certification/accreditation and guidance and how it will affect me as a pilot in the future.
- Accreditation has to be good for the industry.
- Recognising AIRCARE as a united organisation/initiative to standardise the industry.
- Very pleased to see audited accreditation being the aim instead of voluntary industry controls which don't work.
- It is good to see that NZAAA is taking a proactive lead in developing AIRCARE in an effort to satisfy the requirements of unitary and regional authorities, Government agencies, CAA and private party enterprises.
- As a forest owner, the AIRCARE system should provide value to us.
- AIRCARE accreditation likely to be of value to Zespri – future engagement would be welcomed.
- Good start, but there's still a misunderstanding of AIRCARE requirements from some operators.
- Issue surrounding the implementation of the AIRCARE programme as it needs to capture the entire industry to be effective.
- Thank you, looking forward to becoming AIRCARE accredited in the near future.

Information for councils, operators and stakeholders

A theme which emerged strongly through all meetings was the importance of communication, information and education of a wide range of stakeholders to improve understanding about the rural aviation industry. A number of the initiatives suggested were wider than originally anticipated in the project but will be explored as being valuable contributions to the project. These included discussions with Federated Farmers at a national level about issues facing aviation and raising farmer awareness of issues such as fertiliser quality, onus for notification, identification of wires and hazards and airstrip safety.

4. ISSUES RAISED

As part of the regional meetings, three questions were asked:

- What are the issues relating to aviation in your region?
- What is working and why?
- What is needed for things to work better in the future/possible actions?

In collating the responses, we have identified recurring issues and pulled relevant information from the sections addressing what's currently working well and what needs to happen and included them with the corresponding issue as appropriate. Some information falls outside of these issues and this is listed separately.

The main issues that were identified were:

- "Lifestylers"
- Public perception
- Regulations around waterways/water bodies
- Notification
- Product
- Client facilities.

4.1 "Lifestylers"

Description of the issue

- Complaints from lifestylers about the smell of agrichemicals and fertiliser dust/drift going onto their properties
- Unrealistic expectations from lifestylers relating to peace and quiet in rural areas, receive complaints about noise and hours of operation (even firefighting and rescue helicopters)
- Change of land use – e.g., vineyards and horticulture amongst pastoral land use activities
- Lifestyle subdivisions in rural areas – consent processes don't necessarily consider potential impacts on rural activities
- Incompatibility of activities – e.g., subdivisions in rural areas adjacent to airfields
- Degree of tolerance – reverse sensitivity
- Costly because having to put fertiliser more strategically which influences placement and proof of placement
- Operator is often the "meat in the sandwich" between the client and the lifestyler

What's working well?

- Changing equipment and matching equipment to risk of job has led to less complaints (Waikato)
- Very few lifestylers in New Plymouth (Egmont Village), neighbours Christmas party helps to keep up relations and provision of information (Taranaki)
- No noise complaints, due to consultation between operators and neighbours to understand mitigation actions (Rotorua-Taupo)
- Clear expectations of what is required – useful when dealing with complaints (Nelson-Tasman)
- Consultation with affected parties (e.g., 1080) so neighbours/lifestylers not taken by surprise (Nelson-Tasman)
- Notification and communication pays dividends (Manawatu-Wanganui)

- Notification and communication – let neighbours know (Hawkes Bay)
- Avoiding sensitive areas – e.g., residential areas (Rangiora)
- Detailed information leads to a good job – reduces risk and stress, recording of weather on DFR reduces comeback from complainant
- Industry attitude, “got to do job right”, has led to greater acceptance and fewer complaints (Manawatu-Wellington)
- Reasonable understanding from councils and overflying heights over city (Nelson – Tasman)
- Few complaints from Forest Parks – operators understanding the issues and operating effectively (Wellington-Wairarapa)

What needs to be done to fix the issue?

- Education for lifestylers about aviation activities – agrichemicals/organic fertilisers (odour) – pamphlets, newsletters, use existing mechanisms, “Lifestyle” and “Organic” magazines
- Different council “rules” where less lifestylers
- Greater and clearer communication with lifestylers and neighbours
- Use of LIM reports advising about nature of the rural area
- Ensuring that reverse sensitivity is adequately incorporated into council plans, e.g., land use changes
- Consideration by operators of neighbours in terms of noise etc – flight path/frequency

4.2 Public perceptions

Description of the issue

- “Chemophobia”
- Fertiliser on houses and cars doesn’t look good
- Aerial operators are blamed because they’re more visible
- Perception vs reality – oversensitivity in the community, get complaints from people who are concerned about being “over sprayed” and while some are genuine complaints most aren’t
- Perceptions of discharges into lakes and waterways, especially from lifestylers – they want certainty about placement. Operators need proof of placement and secondary tracking, GPS records are valuable
- Lack of public knowledge (especially from lifestylers and urban development), tend to rely on information they find on the internet (e.g., Google 1080)
- “The main issue with aerial spraying is public perception. Drift is almost non-existent and if present the conditions in which spray is applied it is on the ground within 20m. I’ve had complaints from as far away as 4kms! We need to educate the public.”

What’s working well?

- Aviation spraying not a major source of complaints for council (Auckland)
- Wairarapa airshow demos of ag aviation (static demos of nozzles etc) – greater leverage & positive brand to be built on (Wairarapa – Wellington)

What needs to be done to fix the issue?

- More education and information for community sensitive issue – there have been huge changes in the industry that don’t align with out-of-date public perceptions
- Letting public know about product
- Engagement with public health re: toxin use, especially demo days

- Identify value of what the aircraft is doing
- Better inform the public to address perception issues
- Highlight the good news stories
- Collective approach to managing issues – community expectations
- Pilots being a bit more sensitive to resident angst – sensible responses
- Operator/pilot tools for handling complaints, register of complaints (make it required under AIRCARE) – clear expectations of what’s required is useful when dealing with complaints
- Understanding position in society - minority

4.3 Regulations around waterways/water bodies

Description of the issue

- Definition and clarity of terms required for waterways, water bodies, distance setback, sensitive area, buffer zone
- Additional costs of avoiding water bodies
- Off-target chemicals into waterways
- Spray drifting considerable distances and ending up in waterways which is then irrigated onto vines causing hormone damage
- Hill country strips – limited by season – waterways drier in summer
- Riparian areas – 10-20mtr set back not necessarily practical – production implication of buffer zone
- AHB regulations around toxin use, especially around water ways, size of buffer zones, public health
- Client/farmer expectations that activity will go right up to waterbodies e.g. willows with 24D
- Poor identification of sensitive areas/crops by client/farmer
- Cross-boundary issues, especially for large properties, where the rules vary for each council
- Organic properties – ½ km buffer in forestry operation

What’s working well?

- DOC guidelines for waterways and wetlands (Gisborne)
- Good working relationship with Waikato Regional Council, Waikato Regional Council Plan working quite well (Waikato)
- Plan is simple and uses plain English, council recognises the importance of the aerial industry (Blenheim)
- Relationship with Northland Regional Council compliance staff (Northland)

What needs to be done to fix the issue?

- Working with councils about aerial applications and water bodies – e.g., gullies
- Clear definition of waterways and buffer zones
- Council compliance staff up-skilling, having greater understanding of industry – university planning, RMA, agriculture and horticulture students
- Awareness of what buffer zones “are” and “aren’t”
- Identifying what waterways are of concern – Water Plan under development (Gisborne)
- Partnerships with regulators and stakeholders – all singing from the same song sheet (regional forums)
- Consistency in submissions and messages between related stakeholders, e.g., Federated Farmers, NZAAA, Horticulture NZ, Forestry

- Register of sensitive crops/areas and organic properties – information given to pilots/operators
- Need to be actively involved in plan reviews
- Keep “all practicable steps” (Wellington-Wairarapa)
- Proposed wording “Shall not damage some else’s property” (Rangiora)
- Agreed guidance note around avoiding spray drift

4.4 Notification

Description of the issue

- Client/farmer not understanding their obligation around notification
- Where does the onus of responsibility for notification fall?
- Being able to contact the right people at the right time
- Client/farmer not aware of some of the issues – complaints often go directly to the operator rather than the client/farmer
- Understanding when to notify, who to notify, and whose responsibility it is – general rule that it’s easier for the operator to do it rather than leave it to the client/farmer
- Timeframes for notification

What’s working well?

- Greater communication between clients, operators and neighbours
- Notification helped diffuse issues and manage risks
- Speaking to neighbours
- Written confirmation from client regarding notification.

What need to be done to fix the issue?

- Clarification required about whose responsibility notification is – applicators or occupiers
- More farmer/client education about obligations – farm discussion groups
- Accurate guidelines for farmers about what’s required for the job
- Requires local knowledge, perhaps a database of people who have previously complained
- Greater communication between all parties

4.5 Product

Description of the issue

- Different types of product with different application regimes making jobs more complex
- Economic application of fertiliser to maintain pasture/vegetation cover on hill country
- Fertiliser physical quality has an affect on placement of product
- Spray/fertiliser drift – avoiding drift by reducing application rates and chemicals to satisfy FSC
- Product fit for purpose

What’s working well?

- Product improved – lower active ingredient (Manawatu-Wanganui)
- Better placement of product, use of GPS and tracking, proof and verifications – better equipment (e.g., nozzles) reducing risks (Otago)

- Networking and partnerships – Zespri meet with councils and Federated Farmers meet with council and other stakeholders, e.g., iwi, Beef & Lamb (Rotorua-Taupo)
- Proof of placement – more consistency in product

What needs to be done to fix the issue?

- Educate fertiliser companies about fertiliser quality issues
- Educate clients/farmers about fertiliser physical quality
- Discussion re: fertiliser quality, application, cost/benefits between farmers/clients, fertiliser companies and NZAAA
- Better quality fertiliser
- More granulated product
- Extend FertMark to physical properties of fertiliser
- Banks and others to accept different fertiliser regimes, e.g. suspension liquid fertilizers
- Granulation of fertiliser needs to be driven by farmers stakeholders – set up trials

4.6 Client facilities

Description of the issue

- Wire strike – electric fence lead out wires across valleys and rural broadband cables
- Lack of bins, working off ground, includes rocks, dirt etc, reluctance from client to do anything about it – hard on gear – farmer not getting a quality job and increased cost
- Loss of airstrip from subdivision – adding cost and complexity
- Establishing a heliport/landing base for commercial purposes (Southland)

What needs to be done to fix the issue?

- Airstrip guidelines into airstrip agreements
- Safety for wires
- Engage with Federated Farmers re: fertiliser quality, including from off the ground
- Point out landowner responsibilities re: wires, including insurance liability
- Education re: safe working environment and identifying hazards

4.7 Other issues (general)

- Biodiversity – is consent required for vegetation clearance?
- Cost of compliance, e.g. spray plan requirements
- Costs to both the farmer and the applicator
- DOC estate – council take into account DOC assessments, land sites, frost protection permitted

4.8 What's working well (general)

- Aviation partnership with DOC – noise abatement agreements, flight paths and altitudes (voluntary) – helps to understand both points of view (West Coast)
- Alignment with GROWSAFE
- Written chemical regulations
- Frost protection – because permitted, not regulated yet
- CAA information on frost protection

4. 9 What's needed for things to work better in the future (general)?

- Chemical liability insurance issues
- Desire to raise the standards/lift the game – taking the lead rather than reacting
- COP hormone spray around vineyards
- Find out where Department of Labour sits on spray-drift issues
- Agricultural Safety Council - DOL
- Tamper-proof clocks, impact on price, improvement on maintenance and safety
- COP for firefighting (industry developed)
- Solutions are cost and productive effective
- Accredited supplier for meat industry (Assure) link into AIRCARE accredited consumer demands
- EPA reassessment process, prohibiting agrichemicals and limited on aerial application
- Active engagement with councils to get AIRCARE incorporated into plans

5. ASSESSMENT OF MEETINGS

Number of attendees

In total 253 people attended the regional meetings. Of these:

- 127 (50%) were pilots or operators
- 80 (32%) were stakeholders (e.g., fertiliser companies, DOC, winegrowers, Federated Farmers, Horticulture NZ, forestry companies, Animal Health Board)
- 46 (18%) were council representatives. (Note that DOC also has a regulatory role as well as stakeholder interest.)

Value of the meeting

Attendees were asked to rate the value of the meeting with 1 being not valuable and 10 being very valuable.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		4	4	33	37	55	57	18	4

It is encouraging to note that the majority of attendees who answered this question (96%) found the meeting to be useful or very useful.

A selection of the comments:

- Excellent meeting, well done
- Positive afternoon where communication between all parties was of value
- Well run meeting
- Informative and open presentation
- Great opportunity to learn
- Most valuable regional meeting in 40 years of being in the industry
- Good presentation, well balanced
- Well put together and well facilitated.

Attendees were asked what was the most value to them from the meeting. In collating this report we have noted a number of common themes, including:

- Good discussion and involvement from those present and good mix of people with different ideas in the room to discuss the topic
- Appreciated learning more about AIRCARE and the project
- Good opportunity to have discussion about local issues
- The meetings contributed to an improved understanding of the industry
- Understanding about the project.

A selection of the comments:

- The variety of people present, the interaction and mix of ideas
- Sitting around a table and listening to all points of view
- Interaction with councils, DOC, Federated Farmers, horticulture growers etc
- Good representation of people on the “coal face” as opposed to theoretical planners
- Better understanding of an industry important to pastoral agriculture
- Discussion on major issues that affect operators, realising that everyone is encountering the same issues
- The need for everyone to be on the same page

- Understanding AIRCARE and how it will affect me as a pilot in the future
- The combined industry approach to the issue
- The educational aspect of the meeting
- Update of what's happening
- Great initiative to protect the industry – well done
- Useful workshop from District Council perspective with regards to our forthcoming District Plan review
- Good potential system to help improve/promote best practice and, in turn, compliance
- It is good to be proactive and have input into the direction of the industry rather than having it done for you
- If the project is continued, a reasonable solution or compromise will resolve
- I usually deal with the aviation industry when there are complaints. Nice to meet them at this meeting.

Meetings raised awareness

The meetings raised awareness of some issues for attendees, including:

- Fertiliser quality issues and dust, had never considered fertiliser dust
- Increased technology and skill of industry
- That noise is an issue
- The influence of the minority on public issues
- AIRCARE was a new concept to many
- Some operator ignorance of current requirements
- Unattainable drift restrictions for some products
- Risk of buffer zones – particularly the lack of definition
- Planning and different rules for different areas, inconsistencies between regional councils about rules, the practical difficulty of some regional and district rules
- Problems through changes in land use
- Hormone effects on vineyards
- Benefit of more thorough notification processes before jobs, need for better handout material to consent holders, responsibility and notification of neighbours
- How in depth the environmental problems are
- Overhead wires – hadn't realized how high some farmers have them on their farms
- Noise and perception of noise being such an issue
- Lifestyler issues and the depth of feeling among operators about this issue

Suggestions for ongoing communication about the project

A number of comments suggested information about the project is shared regularly and many attendees expressed a desire for further regional meetings of this nature.

A selection of the comments:

- Meetings like this should be held more frequently
- Well worth while, I will take much more interest in future
- We need more interaction between all sectors, working together is positive
- Good stuff, I look forward to being able to continue to participate
- Would be good for us to follow up to have an annual meeting of DOC, fertiliser companies and operators to let each know of their issues
- Need to sell to general public

- Good to have people like John and Lynette making the effort to promote this and put information out and about
- We need to have more industry-led discussions of the nature which are advocating a balanced approach to issues
- Great start, make sure the group advocates during the District Plan process
- A very good concept, I look forward to seeing the completion of the project
- Keep information flowing, awareness is essential
- Keep us up to date with progress and initiate ongoing meetings with council planners as we review our plans – we need to work together on this
- You will need to get industry buy-in and also your industry’s customers, without that it will be an uphill battle
- Happy to attend, will be making sure issues are discussed in farming circles
- Need to keep at least annual updates to ensure project momentum.

Recommendations for future meetings

- Greater representation by local councils in some areas, as well as representatives from other stakeholder groups.
- Use less or explain aviation jargon for non-operators.
- Stick to the relevant issues, some attendees noted that the conversation detoured for anecdotes and stories that detracted from the purpose of the meeting (e.g., helicopter talk, forestry discussion, tourist information, fertiliser industry issues).
- Technical operator information may be best kept for operator-only meetings, rather than in the body of the main presentation for stakeholders and regulators, some attendees felt there were too many background slides and one stakeholder commented that he got “lost” during the presentation.
- Ensure you have the right balance of information on topics, while most people appreciated the information on AIRCARE, some felt that it was long-winded.