

**IN THE MATTER**

of the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER**

of hearings on the Proposed Waitomo  
District Council District Plan

**Submission from:**

New Zealand Helicopter Association (NZHA)

**To:**

Hearing Commissioners, Waitomo District  
Council Plan

**Date:**

03/05/24

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 I am Richard Milner, Executive Officer of the New Zealand Helicopter Association.
- 1.2 I am a commercial helicopter pilot and unmanned aircraft operator with 20 years of aviation experience. I have owned and operated helicopters in New Zealand and Australia.
- 1.3 The New Zealand Helicopter Association represents the commercial interests of the helicopter sector in the New Zealand industry. It is difficult to define precisely how much of the GDP commercial aviation contributes as it is entwined in so many aspects of New Zealand business and is often a necessary but overlooked part as a tool for a specific purpose and used in industries such as but not limited to:
- Aerial Spotting
  - Asset management,
  - Construction,
  - Disaster relief work (after the State emergency has ended)
  - Flight training,
  - Frost protection,
  - Infrastructure repairs and development,
  - Science and Research
  - Search and Rescue
  - Surveillance
  - Survey operations
  - Tourism
  - Transportation of people
  - TV and Film

It is essential to raise the concern that limiting the operations of helicopters through rules and requirements in this plan, where the rule's intent means one thing to the council but is not clear to operators, can become restrictive and have unintended consequences.

Commercial aviation is also an essential tool for disaster relief, emergency work, short-notice repairs, and maintenance of national assets, including but not limited to the electrical, water, gas, and telecommunications services essential to the NZ public.

While the plan allows for emergency work requiring a state of emergency to be declared, it is often overlooked that a downed power pole from a motor vehicle accident that can't be solved quickly without a crane truck usually becomes a helicopter operation. The way these rules have been written casts doubt on whether the community would have power for heating and cooking, which are the root concerns of our submissions. It is also essential to recognise that if commercial aviation operations are overly restrictive, the helicopter operators that the district has come to rely on will have to move their operations away from the district or face closing their businesses. In this case, those assets for emergency and disaster relief work (such as those recently in the Port Hills in Christchurch) would experience longer dispatch times, which would have consequences for the public. It is important also to note that during Cyclone Gabrielle, helicopters performed emergency operations long before a state of emergency was declared, preserving life, and those assets would not be available should the district plan unintentionally restrict commercial aviation operations.

It is important to recognise that agricultural aviation is part of commercial aviation in New Zealand. Many agricultural aviation operators also operate in other commercial aviation sectors, and the viability of their businesses depends on all their activities.

## 2. **NZHA's submissions**

### General

- 2.1 The notified Waitomo PDP does not adequately provide for commercial aviation activities.
- 2.2 NZHA acknowledges that if accepted, the recommendations in the S42A NOISE, GRUZ and NOSZ reports would adequately provide for agricultural aviation activities through GRUZ-R1 'Agricultural, pastoral and horticultural activities' and proposed NOISE rule exemption #4 and #7.

**However, they do not adequately provide for other commercial aviation activities that are essential to the district's interests.**

## Noise

- 2.3 We note S42A point #26, which states that ‘the correction proposed by the Council clarifies that there is no intention to restrict flight movements in the general rural, natural open space or rural production zones or aerodrome precinct.’
- 2.4 We further note that S42A point #26 states that a clarifying sentence is added to the rule to state that all flight movements in the general rural, natural open space and rural production zones and aerodrome precinct are permitted’. **This is supported in part.**

NZHA would like to see that movements of commercial helicopters for the purposes listed in Section 1.3 of this document be permitted where their operations are of a temporary and infrequent nature. Mediation with Selwyn District Council clarified their TEMP Noise Rule would cater for this approach; NZHA is currently working closely with Timaru and Mackenzie District Councils for a similar approach where the movement of Helicopters for temporary and infrequent operations be unrestricted. NZHA fully supports a resource consent process for a permanent heliport or helicopter movement area for regular operations, which is very different from operations that are conducted infrequently.

- 2.5 The S42A point #30 that NOISE-R8 is amended to exclude noise emitted by helicopters used by the Department of Conservation undertaking a conservation activity is **supported**.
- 2.6 The S42A point #51 to exempt fixed-wing aircraft take-offs and landings in the natural open space zone and general rural zone is **supported**.
- 2.7 The S42A point 59 request that intermittent and infrequent use of helicopter landing areas not being supported by the report is **NOT supported by NZHA**.

NZHA would like to draw attention to the necessity for staging areas for helicopters for operations such as erecting and maintaining critical infrastructure, repairing and conducting preventative maintenance of a range of activities where a crane is not suitable and transporting equipment/ building materials from one work site to another. Even something as simple as transporting persons from one place to another would mean that if more than one pickup in a week was conducted, it could only be done with a resource's consent. Often, more than ten movements would be required to complete these operations. Sometimes, at short notice. It is again important to note that NZHA fully supports Resource consent for a permanent heliport, such as a tourism or private operator erecting a heliport and permanent base of operations.

This could also be adequately catered for in the Noise Exemptions with the inclusion of:

Helicopters used for construction, maintenance, repair and transportation of persons and equipment for operations other than tourism

### General Rural Zone

- 2.8 S42A point #80 proposes that a farm helipad remains instead of a helicopter landing area. This recommendation is **not supported**.

Other District plans have adopted Helicopter landing areas, and for clarity, this would assist in some cohesion and better understanding across various plans. However, the intention for agricultural activities is not lost either. NZHA would like to see a clarification that either the Farm helipad or Helicopter landing area is not intended for temporary and infrequent operations and that permanent, fixed-base operations would require Resource consent. Not all helicopter operations are agricultural by nature, such as construction, maintenance, and repairs of assets and equipment.

- 2.9 S42A point #82, proposing a revised definition of agricultural aviation activities from that originally sought by NZAAA, **is supported**.

- 2.10 The S42A point #83 amendment to the definition of agricultural, pastoral and horticultural activities **is supported**.

- 2.11 The S42A point #84, the definition of 'farm airstrips and farm helipads' to align with the use of 'rural airstrip' and 'farm helipad' **is supported**

### Natural Open Air Spaces

- 2.12 The S42A point 24/ 25 is supported as the report clarifies the intent of the rule – conservation activities in chapter 9.

## **3. Decisions sought**

- 3.1 Amend Noise R8 RDIS Item 8 – AIRCARE accreditation can no longer be achieved as it no longer exists. It will be continued through the Aviation Industry Association Noise Accreditation Programme.

Also, the HAI has been rebranded VAI -Vertical Aviation International, so this may change soon.

~~Whether the proposal is in accordance with non-statutory guidelines such as Helicopter Association International Fly Neighbourly Guide 1993 and whether the operation is AIRCARE accredited and~~

It would be recommended to change these two guidelines to read –

**Whether the proposal meets New Zealand industry best practice Guidelines.**

- 3.2 Amend the NOISE rule exemptions
3. Helicopters are used as an air ambulance or for emergency operations. **Helicopters are used by the Department of Conservation**, the military, CDEM or search and rescue operations. This includes training to undertake those activities.
  7. **In the general rural and natural open space zones, noise is emitted during recreational hunting or during the takeoff and landing of fixed-wing aircraft.**
  15. **Helicopters are used for the construction, maintenance, repair, and transportation of persons and equipment for operations other than tourism.**
- 3.3 Seek to have the proposed revised definition of ‘farm airstrips and farm helipads’ accepted:

Rural airstrips and farm helipads are any areas of land designed to be used for the landing, departure, movement, or servicing of aircraft (including fixed-wing aeroplanes, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles) for the purpose of agricultural aviation activities. For clarity, it does not include the storage of aircraft, freight handling facilities, **airstrips, or helipads directly associated with commercial passenger transport.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement supporting the NZHA’s submissions and further submissions.



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New Zealand Helicopter Association