

Safety Investigation Brief

Speed Wing Fatal Accident, Mt Isthmus near Wanaka, 14 October 2018

18/7250

At approximately 0900 hours on 14 October 2018 New Zealand Daylight Time, a speed wing¹ pilot commenced his take-off run from sloping terrain on the south-east side of Mt Isthmus, near Wanaka. While running down the tussock covered slope during the take-off, the pilot most likely lost his footing or tripped. This resulted in the speed wing collapsing and the pilot falling approximately 150 metres down the steep terrain. Although he was wearing a helmet, the pilot sustained fatal head injuries.

The pilot was in the company of a friend who was intending to launch his speed wing after the pilot had taken-off. A Go-Pro camera was attached to his helmet which recorded part of the accident sequence, the recorded video was beneficial to the Civil Aviation safety investigation.

Speed wing flying comes under the jurisdiction of Civil Aviation Rule Part 106 *Hang Gliders – Operating Rules*. Part 106 requires a pilot to be a bona fide member of a hang gliding organisation affiliated to the New Zealand Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (NZHGPA), and hold an appropriate certificate. Neither the pilot nor his friend were members of a hang gliding organisation or club, they were therefore in non-compliance with Civil Aviation Rule Part 106.

Speed wing flying is an extreme sport that comes with elevated levels of risk compared with normal paragliding, due to the higher flying speeds involved, and being in very close proximity to the ground.

Training requirements have been established by the NZHGPA for speed wing flying. The pilot in this accident choose not to take advantage of that training, and by not being a member of a recognised club, was not in conformance with recommended practices.

It is considered that further in-depth CAA safety investigation will not provide any significant safety benefit. The current Civil Aviation Rules, coupled with the NZHGPA requirements for speed wing flying are considered suitable for the activity.

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¹ A Speed Wing, also known as Speed Glider or Speed Flyer, is generally half the size of a paragliding wing and has a much smaller glide ratio, which promotes flying close to slopes at nearly twice the speed of a normal paragliding canopy.