

# So You Don't Think You Need a NOTAM?

The failure to consult NOTAMs and AIP Supplements is keeping CAA safety investigators busy examining potentially deadly occurrences.

**O**n 10 February 2017, Department of Conservation Golden Bay Operations Manager, Andrew Lamason, requested a temporary restricted area be put in place at the bottom of Farewell Spit.

Over three days, more than 600 pilot whales stranded in the Triangle Flat area, and “hundreds and hundreds” of volunteers turned up to try to get them back out to sea.

“Just eight DOC officers had to coordinate all those volunteers, direct a massive amount of road traffic, and of course, look after the animals,” says Andrew.

“Helicopters, mainly transporting reporters, arrived, landing in the middle of it all. Then the drones came, whooping across the top of the stranding ground.

“Our first priorities were the animals, and the safety of the

people around them, but the chances of a disaster in such circumstances were reasonably high.

“The restricted area gave us a modicum of control, at least of airborne traffic.”

Despite a NOTAM advising pilots of the restricted airspace, two helicopters soon swooped in.

“Which made us think,” says Andrew, “what was the point?”

Further south, near Kaikoura, and at about the same time, Lindsay Bell was shaking his head at a similar lack of professionalism.

Lindsay is the aircraft operations manager for the stabilisation of ‘northern slips’ on State Highway 1, caused by the November 2016 earthquake.



(A0287/17 NOTAMN  
Q) NZZC/QRTCA/IV/BO /W /000/020/4030S17243E015  
A) NZZC B) 1702100109 C) 1702120001  
E) TEMPO RESTRICTED AREA NZR691 (FOSSIL POINT, FAREWELL SPIT)  
APRX 19NM N NZTK, IS PRESCRIBED AS FLW:  
ALL THAT AIRSPACE BOUNDED BY A LINE JOINING  
S 40 29 58.8, E 172 44 26.5  
S 40 30 54.2, E 172 45 24.5  
S 40 31 22.0, E 172 44 01.5 (PUPONGA HARBOUR)  
S 40 30 06.3, E 172 42 58.2 (PILLAR POINT)  
S 40 29 48.3, E 172 42 54.3  
S 40 29 58.8, E 172 44 26.5  
ACTIVITY: MARINE STRANDING  
ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY: DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
PRESCRIBED PURSUANT TO CIVIL AVIATION RULE PART 71 UNDER A DELEGATED  
AUTHORITY ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL AVIATION  
F) SFC G) 2000FT AMSL)

“At any one time, we have had up to 13 helicopters in the air: some with 1300 kilograms of water slung on long lines underneath – to sluice the loose material on the hillside – and others transporting geologists and abseilers and other specialist personnel.”

There was a NOTAM issued advising pilots of the temporary restricted area (NZR893 Clarence), approximately 1 NM out to sea and 1 NM inland from the coast, and up to 1500 ft.

Despite that, there have been “two to three incursions a week” into the restricted area.

“With 1300 kilos of seawater slung underneath your machine, you can’t turn or avoid in a hurry. You’re keeping an eye on the bucket, you’re keeping an eye out for the other helicopters, you’re working close to the hillside, and you’re taking direction from the geologists about where to drop the load.

“Then some idiot comes straight in, sometimes at a height below that of the helicopters, on the wrong frequency, with no radio call to notify us or request to come through.

“Some of them have given our guys a helluva fright. It’s lazy and dangerous, or it’s stupid and dangerous.”

CAA Aviation Safety Adviser, Carlton Campbell, says such occurrences are all too frequent.

“Airport operators often have issues with pilots landing on runways with work in progress, and that are consequently closed and ‘NOTAMed’.”

Despite the fact that obtaining a NOTAM is free, there have been, in fact, 65 reported occurrences in the last six years, due

to non-compliance with a NOTAM or AIP Supplement.

“Nowadays, pilots often complain about drone activity, and how dangerous it is, but often, they haven’t consulted the NOTAMs to find out the drone flights are, actually, notified.”

Carlton visited the Kaikoura northern slips site during the sluicing operation.

“While I was there, a C152 went through at 700 ft. There were 11 helicopters in the air at the time, and about six of them made alarmed calls about this guy. The pilot had radioed that he was coming through, but hadn’t got permission, let alone a briefing, to do that. He obviously thought his couple of calls were enough.

“At the very least, the Cessna was a distraction to the heli pilots, who were absorbed in a busy operation requiring their maximum attention.

“Incredibly, he returned shortly after, at 1000 ft, still in restricted airspace, again without approval.

“Guys like that, their ignorance *will* catch up with them one day.”

Chief Flying Instructor of Canterbury Aero Club, Nathan Clarke, believes some pilots don’t consult NOTAMs because they fly mainly in their home area.

“Heli and fixed wing pilots operating in remote areas or on regular routes within their own patch are particularly at risk.

“On the day they do have to fly further, they forget to check NOTAMs, or forget how to do it, or ignore their significance,” he says.

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Photo courtesy of Kurt Sharpe, Department of Conservation.

*“All too often when I broach the topic I get a flippant ‘Who checks NOTAMs?’ response, as if it’s not an essential part of a standard preflight routine.”*

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Of course, even if such pilots were to never move much beyond their home base, they assume that area will never be closed in an emergency.

Nathan Clarke says the other type of AIP-ignoring pilot is the ‘alpha male’.

“I’ve been in meetings with pilots who say, ‘I haven’t got time to be pissing around with that sort of thing’ and they don’t care that it’s a legal requirement.

“I show pilots how to obtain the NOTAMs, but I’m disappointed when I realise that they won’t bother checking, even before their very next flight.”

Carlton Campbell believes some pilots are embarrassed they can’t interpret NOTAM ‘language’, and that’s why they don’t consult them.

“All too often when I broach the topic I get a flippant ‘Who checks NOTAMs?’ response, as if it’s not an essential part of a standard preflight routine.

“I suspect there’s a lack of confidence in being able to decipher the message, given some aspects are not in plain language.”

But Nathan Clarke believes that’s often just a symptom of a wider disengagement from the system.

“They don’t understand the language because they don’t use it regularly and don’t know where to find the meaning of the abbreviations. The fact they don’t bother to get a refresher on the language reflects their belief they’re a sole operator, not part of an interconnected safety ‘system’.”

Possibly the best opportunity for communicating the importance of consulting NOTAMs and AIP Supps is during a Biennial Flight Review.

“Pilots are motivated to learn how to consult and understand them, and with any luck, that will remain with them,” says Carlton.

## Careful Reading, Careful Wording

CAA Safety Investigator Siobhan Mandich – who’s been examining a number of recent occurrences directly emerging from confusion surrounding NOTAMs – says pilots have to be careful when they read them.

“Some aerodrome designations can be similar, such as CS for Cromwell Racecourse aerodrome, and CW for Cromwell aerodrome.”

A review of NOTAM-related occurrences over the last few years indicates that some pilots may know a NOTAM has been

issued for a particular aerodrome, but think they can handle the risk, ‘Oh, I’ll just do a touch and go.’

But there might be a big hole in the surface of the runway, or, as in a recent instance, people actually on the runway.

Siobhan Mandich says the parties requesting the restricted airspace also have a role to play.

“For instance, event organisers may have requested restricted airspace above their event, or a runway closure. A NOTAM may have been issued. But that does not mean they can relax, assuming everyone has read or understood the NOTAM. They still need to keep an eye out for errant pilots and keep a radio watch so they can quickly contact them.”

Roger Shepherd, CAA’s Investigating Officer of Aviation Related Concerns (ARCs) says that organisations asking for a restriction or closure need to be careful how they word their request.

“I’ve investigated a few ARCs where the mowing gang or council is very aggrieved that an aircraft landed when a NOTAM was issued for just that – mowing. Except it neglected to actually say the runway was closed.

“Clear language is everything.”

Safety investigator Steve Rogers says an occurrence he recently looked at highlights the need for pilots to always take the responsibility for checking NOTAMs.

“Even if pilots are used to, say, the local air traffic service telling them whether one is in place,” he says.

The occurrence Steve investigated involved the controller omitting to tell a group of eight pilots about a NOTAM, and the pilots assuming therefore, there wasn’t one.

“All eight, a short time later, barrelled through the activated restricted area above snow-bombing near the Homer Tunnel.

“They’d all become so used,” says Steve, “to this de facto operational practice of the ATS telling them whether an activation NOTAM was in place, that they’d become completely reliant on it.





“But that does not in any way absolve them from checking for themselves. It’s an integral part of a preflight. You check the weather, you decide on your alternate (landing spot, should the first not be available for some reason) and you check your NOTAMs and Supps.”

CAA’s Aeronautical Services Officer, Paula Moore, agrees.

“Part of a preflight briefing includes obtaining and reading the current information relevant for the flight contained in the AIP Supp and NOTAM.

Paula says pilots must understand the information in the Supp is not duplicated in the NOTAM and vice versa.

“The NOTAM may refer to further details contained in the Supp, but **both** must be read to be fully aware of the current status of airspace, navigational aids, aerodrome availability, etcetera.

“Temporary changes of long duration (three months or more), and information of short duration which contains extensive text and/or graphics are published as AIP Supplements.

“NOTAMs are issued when there’s insufficient time for the distribution of an AIP Supplement, ie, less than 90 days notification.”

Paula also says it’s not enough to check for a NOTAM only once – before flying.

“Pilots should be updating their knowledge en route. They need to check with FISCOM that a new NOTAM has not been issued, since they became airborne, activating a temporary restricted/danger area on the route they are flying, or closing their destination aerodrome.”

Further, pilots often look at the aerodrome list of NOTAMs to find those relevant to them, but fail to look in the en-route section where there may be information critical to their flight.

## Not If, But When

RNZAF Squadron Leader Jim Rankin organises about 20 air force flying displays a year. At least once a year, he says, someone busts the restricted area put in place around the display.

“Some years ago, an Iroquois was practising for Warbirds Over Wanaka, when he radioed the tower to say, ‘there’s a Cessna coming in on final’.

“I was in the tower with the controller and when we looked, sure enough, there was a Cessna, on about a one mile final,

couple of hundred feet. We tried to call him on the frequencies that were in the Supp, but got no response.

“They eventually got him on the unattended aerodrome frequency, told the guy to vacate the area, and to phone the tower when he eventually landed elsewhere.

“About an hour later he phoned from Omarama:

‘Were you aware there was an airshow on?’ he was asked.

‘No.’

‘Did you read your AIP Supplement or NOTAMs?’

‘I thought I had, but obviously I missed it.’

‘OK, can we speak to your instructor please?’

‘I am the instructor.’

“We found that pretty hard to believe, that an instructor could get it so totally wrong. We were looking at a potential catastrophe.”

Jim believes it’s “definitely” a matter of when – and not if – there’s a mid-air collision.

“We have two observers on the ground now, whose sole job it is to scan the sky and warn us if someone is coming in. That’s actually in our Standard Operating Procedures.”

Jim, who’s based at Ohakea, says some military operating areas (MOAs) are permanently active, and some are notified by NOTAM.

“In active MOAs, there can be shells flying, big bangs, some pretty big projectiles being lobbed around. Fly through that, and life could get really bad, really quickly.” ■



### Further information

Email [info@caa.govt.nz](mailto:info@caa.govt.nz) for a free copy of our *Check NOTAMs and AIP Supps* poster. It comes in both A4 and A2 sizes.

