

VRPs – make sure you're on the same page

There are 612 visual reporting points within New Zealand's domestic airspace and they're there for a reason.

VRPs assist safe conduct of flight by way of visual reference, says former CAA Aeronautical Services Officer Paula Moore.

"They could be places in uncontrolled airspace for instance, in addition to features already shown on the visual navigation charts, such as towns. They give people a place to report; they have a very good use.

"They're usually places that are easily recognisable, but not already labelled on charts. For example, the Waterworks at Ardmore, and the Karaka sale yards outside the Auckland CTR, are well-known VRPs."

Visual reporting points and their purpose are outlined in Part 71, under rule 71.251.

"They are based on a prominent geographical feature and they're identified by a name or designator that's easily recognisable in voice communications. Therefore they're not given long, complex names," says Paula.

They also help air traffic services with the progress of an aircraft, so they know when it has crossed a reporting point and is tracking towards another.

Paula says pilots need to avoid using locations not shown on the visual navigation charts.

"Pilots flying in their local area are tempted to use local place names or features that they and other local pilots are familiar with. But they may mean nothing to a transiting pilot and that's a potential hazard.

"The such and such intersection, or the bridge over such and such river might be fine between local pilots, but pilots who are not from that area won't know what you're talking about."

Don't confuse things

Jason Hobday, the IFR Training Manager and Flight Examiner at Canterbury Aero Club, says using official reporting points is something they try to reinforce.

"If you use local terminology, it will confuse a transiting pilot who doesn't know what you mean by 'the meatworks' for example.

"Using the official points takes away any element of doubt and everyone is on the same page."

Jason says VRPs have become more important than ever around Christchurch.

"Over the years we've lost a number of geographical references, with a lot of forest being cut down. Some pilots fell into the trap of using them as reporting points, but now we're trying to stick to the official VRPs, to be more precise."

He says VRPs are extremely useful for students flying into unfamiliar areas.

"Because they are normally associated with prominent features, they allow you to navigate around an area you're new to.

"They give you positive tracking information. You know where you are, or your position relative to that point, and you can let other people know exactly where you are, so there's no ambiguity about your location." ■



The Pier VRP

Photo courtesy of Matt Hayes.