

ENGAGEMENT AND TOP-DOWN COMMITMENT

A finalist in the CAA's new safety award outlines the work that triggered the nomination.

For Josh Haslemore – one of three finalists in the CAA's inaugural Young Aviation Professional Award – modernising a safety culture starts with engagement.

Josh's nomination was for his work in updating the standard operating procedures of the Auckland Coastguard Air Patrol – of which he is chairperson – and for establishing a robust safety management system for the organisation.

All in his own time

As well as his up to 10 hours a week volunteer commitment to the air patrol committee, and – during summer – more weekly hours as an operational inflight co-ordinator, he has a full-time day job as a senior safety specialist with Air New Zealand.

As part of establishing an SMS, the 27-year-old – the youngest coastguard committee chair in the country – led work in improving hazard identification and risk evaluation, introducing processes of continual improvement, and digitising procedures and records.

It's been, and continues to be, a big job that began by engaging with air patrol volunteers and with the wider Coastguard service.

"It's been challenging," says Josh. "We have a range of ages, new recruits and veterans, differing degrees of flying experience and therefore differing appetites for risk.

"When you have a seemingly safe flying culture, it's testing for some long-serving members of an organisation to accept there's an even better way of doing it.

"But we put in place robust and appropriate procedures and training so that our volunteers – whatever their experience and appetite for risk – operate to the same standard."

Josh says that, nevertheless, all volunteers know that if they're uncertain about a mission, the lines of communication are well and truly open.

"If need be, pilots are able to call our chief pilot for further advice should they have any uncertainty about operating on the day. Not being able to fly is at times a reality of the operation and, although we're a vital asset in saving lives, our crew's safety is at the forefront of what we do."

Slow and steady

Josh says that given the breadth of changes made to improve safety, the committee took things slowly.

"I can't stress enough the importance of doing this gradually, to avoid alienating those whose buy-in we need the most.

"We try to keep safety and risk management simple. Overloading staff and volunteers with safety information just for the sake of compliance is ineffective and it ends up doing more harm than good."

Josh also reshaped the relationship between the four-person air patrol committee and its 27 volunteers.

"Relatively speaking, we are a very young committee and we see our role as supporting the volunteers and their work, rather than the committee occupying the upper strata of a two-level hierarchy."

That approach has led to increased reporting, and more volunteers turning up to training nights.

"They're increasingly engaged, which is actually measurable though a constant stream of feedback to the committee.

"Without this engagement, the safety system just wouldn't work."



// Josh Haslemore

A wider alliance

In the past, the Northland and Auckland Coastguard Air Patrols operated pretty independently of each other, despite coming under the one umbrella of Coastguard Northern Region (CNR).

So Josh reached out to his counterparts in Northland, Willy Morton and Murray Miskelly, and they've since shared the work of improving standard operating procedures and ensuring those SOPs are fit for the purpose of conducting maritime search ops.

"We used to be very separate entities," says Josh, "but now we're collaborating a lot more, linking in remotely to see what each other is up to."

Josh says another 'must' was top-down commitment to putting safety at the heart of everything the patrols do.

"That applies to any organisation: whether its aim is to make money, or save lives at sea, working with those at the helm, showing them how safety aligns with the goals of the organisation, is vital to success.

"I really appreciate Willy and Murray joining me on this challenging road," he says.

"Without buy-in at the top, implementing an effective safety management system just isn't possible.

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"The CEO of Coastguard Northern Region, Callum Gillespie, and CNR board member Roy Savage, have been invaluable parties in supporting change within the air patrols. They, too, don't see compliance as an end goal. They don't see safety as something you 'achieve' then put in a box. They see it ever-evolving."

To illustrate continual improvement, Josh says the patrol's newly created risk register is reviewed every month, together with a re-evaluation of how risk controls are working.

"We might also decide a risk needs to be re-evaluated, or there might be an emerging risk we need to start looking at or focussing on a bit more.

"This stuff is never static." ☞