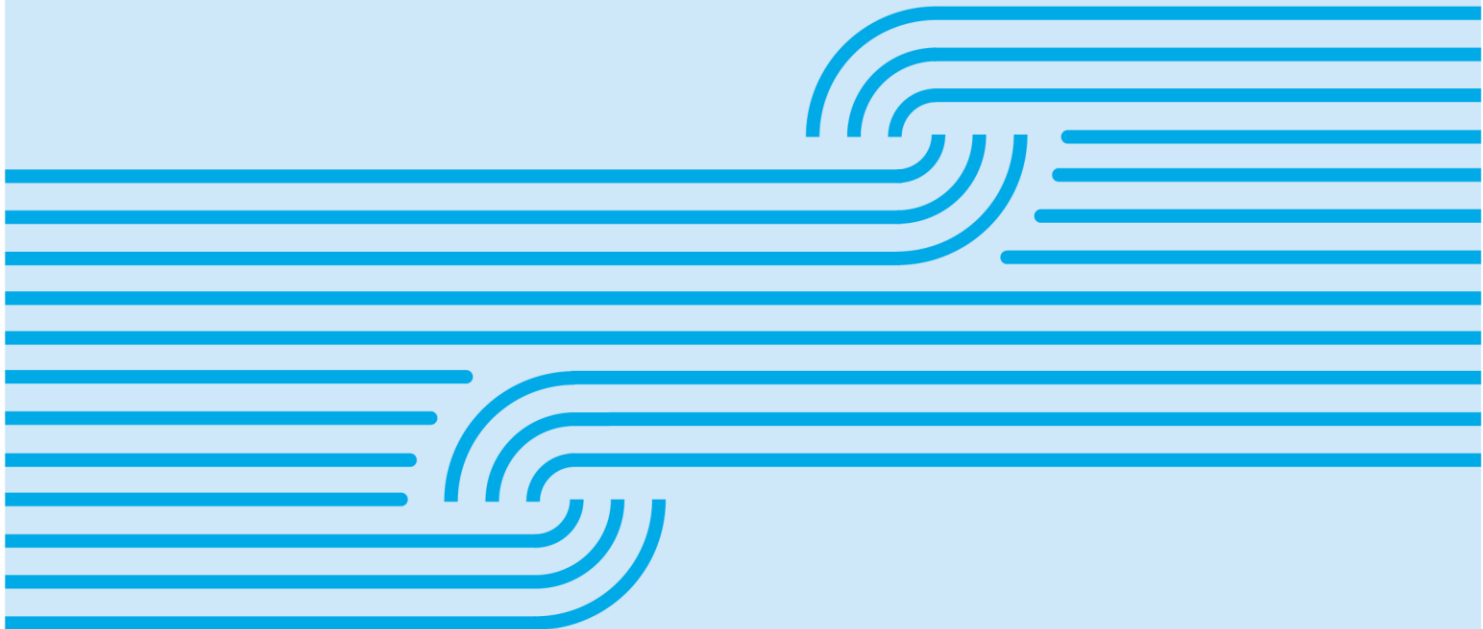




# ZK-HGP Preliminary Investigation Report

A preliminary report into the 28 January 2026 incident near Paekākāriki

Published: 10.6.2026



## Preliminary investigation report

**Location:** Near Paekākāriki      **CAA reference:** 2026-00136

**Date:** 28 January 2026      **Time:** 06:30

**Aircraft type:** Hughes 269C      **Registration:** ZK-HGP

**Flight conducted under:** CAR 91      **Injuries:** 2 Fatal

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*Disclaimer: This preliminary report is issued by the Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand (CAA) to provide early information on the progress of an ongoing investigation into an aviation occurrence.*

*The information is based on evidence available at the time of release and may be incomplete or subject to change as the investigation progresses.*

*This report is intended to inform the aviation community and the public. It does not determine cause or assign blame.*

# Summary of the incident

At about 6:30am<sup>1</sup> on Wednesday, 28 January 2026, a Hughes 269C helicopter, registration ZK-HGP (the helicopter) impacted terrain near Paekākāriki, Wellington. The pilot and one crewmember onboard the aircraft were fatally injured.

## About the pilot and crewmember

At the time of the accident, the pilot held a New Zealand CAA Commercial Pilot's licence (Helicopter) and was type rated on the Hughes 269C. A current Class 1 medical certificate and biennial flight review (BFR)<sup>2</sup> were also held. Aged 54, the pilot had accumulated approximately 6000 flight hours across a range of helicopter types in New Zealand and overseas and was employed by the aircraft owner to conduct aerial hunting operations.

The crewmember, aged 25, was a professional hunter, also employed by the aircraft owner, and regularly worked alongside the pilot during aerial hunting operations.

## What we know so far

- The pilot and crewmember were conducting an aerial pest culling operation targeting feral goats and deer.
- The operation commenced in good light conditions at approximately 6:20am, with the pilot making a radio call to the Paraparaumu Flight Service Station to advise of their presence and intentions.
- In coordination with the pilot, the crewmember used a semi-automatic rifle to shoot animals from the helicopter whilst in flight.
- The aircraft was fitted with a cockpit video recorder (CVR) which recorded the flight. With the cooperation of the aircraft owner<sup>3</sup>, CAA investigators were able to view the footage of the next sequence of events.
- The firearm being used experienced a stoppage, meaning the action of the firearm was no longer able to cycle ammunition. In line with their standard operating procedure, the pilot looked to land the helicopter so the firearm could safely be cleared.

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<sup>1</sup> All times referred to are in NZDT

<sup>2</sup> A BFR is a two-yearly review of a pilot's proficiency in normal and emergency operations and manoeuvres.

<sup>3</sup> CAA NZ has no power to gain access to, inspect or to require the production or surrender of a CVR under the Civil Aviation Act 2023 and the Transport Accident Investigation Commission Act 1990.

- At about 6:29am the helicopter approached a small spur with a clearing large enough for the helicopter to land in. The clearing in the vegetation had a mixture of long grass and low ferns, mixed with some low gorse bushes and surrounded on one side by larger gorse and native shrubs and trees. The spur landing spot dropped away sharply on both sides.
- Running parallel along the spur amongst the regenerating bush, was an old stock fence comprised of fencing wire and timber battens and posts.
- The fence line had deteriorated, was in poor condition, and the section of fence through the spur clearing was lying low or flat to the ground. Obscured by regenerating vegetation that had grown around and through the fence, the fence was not generally visible. The CVR confirmed it would not likely have been visible to the pilot or crewmember.
- The helicopter landed on the spur clearing on a heading of approximately 145deg with both landing skids on the ground and engine running.
- Comparison between site photos and the CVR show the helicopter landed either extremely close to, or on top of the fence, where it lay amongst the vegetation.
- The pilot and crewmember communicated about the stoppage with the firearm and several rounds of ammunition were fired out of the firearm by the crewmember until it was cycling again.
- Around 6:30 am the pilot advised the crewmember that he was taking off again.
- Evidence from the helicopter and the scene show that in taking off, the left helicopter skid hooked a wire from the old stock fence. As the helicopter moved away from the clearing a strand of fencing wire came free from the fence.
- The freed wire caught and wrapped in the tail rotor, causing the helicopter to yaw heavily to the right, and despite large left anti-torque pedal input from the pilot, the yaw was unrecoverable.
- The helicopter experienced a loss of control and descended before impacting terrain approximately 100 metres away from the landing site and coming to rest, wedged against trees below a rock face and above a small creek bed.
- A crash detection alert from a mobile device associated with the flight was transmitted shortly after the accident.
- The aircraft was located at approximately 7:55 am by another helicopter operating in the area. Emergency services responded, and both occupants were found deceased.

- The aircraft's emergency locator transmitter activated; however, the signal was received by the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ)<sup>4</sup> after the aircraft had already been located.
- CAA staff inspected ZK-HGP at the accident site on the day of the accident, and later the following week after the wreckage was recovered and removed to a secure site.
- The initial inspection revealed that:
  - the helicopter appeared to have struck the terrain vertically, likely in a level attitude, perpendicular to the slope of the terrain, with no lateral airspeed
  - At the impact the right-side skid gear had separated and remained at the point of impact at the associated ground scar.
  - The main fuselage rolled approximately five metres below the point of initial impact and had come to rest against the trees in the area of the creek bed.
  - The tail boom had separated from the main fuselage at impact. It came to rest in the bush directly below the point of initial impact.
  - A quantity of fencing wire had coiled around the tail rotor gearbox output shaft and tail rotor pitch control slider and tail rotor blade pitch change links.
  - A section of fencing wire approximately four metres in length was also found loosely located with the main fuselage, resting across the cabin area structure.
  - The main rotor gearbox was still attached to the main fuselage and the main rotor blades exhibited little to no rotational energy at the time of impact with the terrain.
- At this stage of the investigation, there is no evidence to suggest that mechanical condition or weather were contributory factors.

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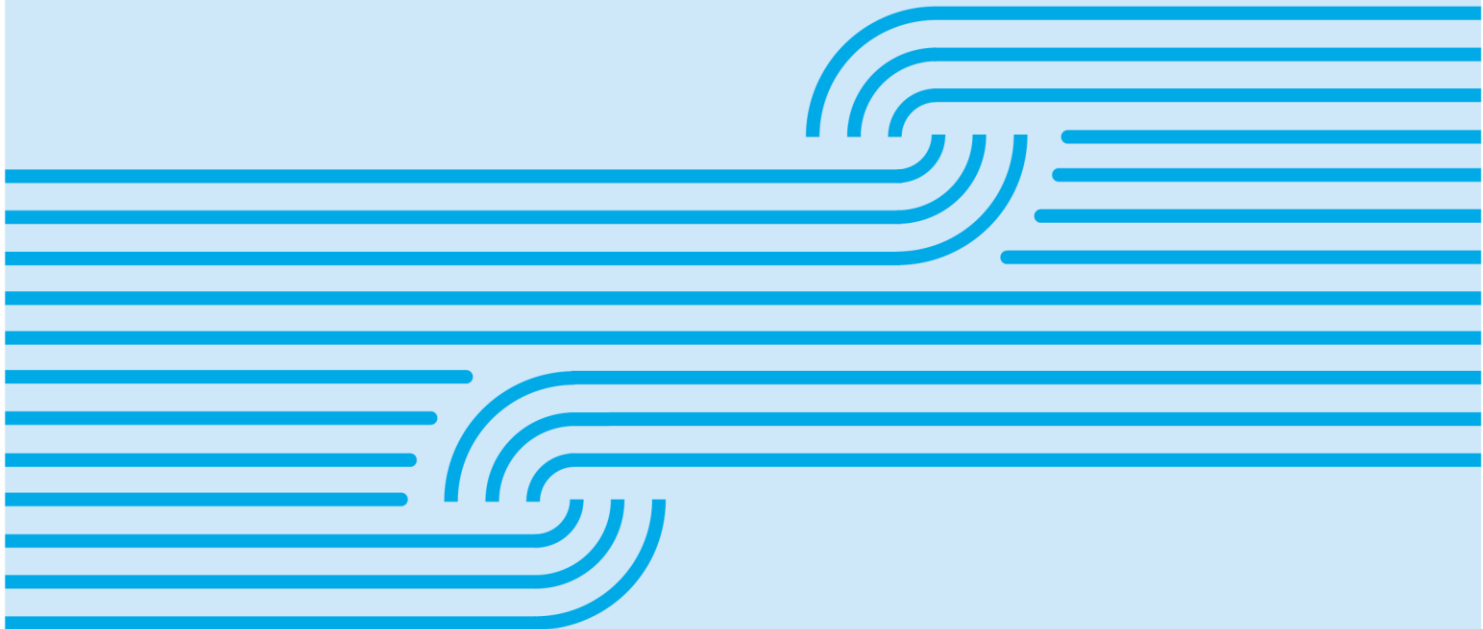
**Note:** 1) Some personal details have been omitted to respect privacy; 2) If you have information related to this incident or safety concerns in general, please contact the Civil Aviation Authority.

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<sup>4</sup> The RCCNZ is responsible for coordinating major maritime, aviation and distress beacon-related search and rescue missions.



CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY  
OF NEW ZEALAND  
*Te Mana Rererangi Tūmatanui o Aotearoa*



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