



Is the NZ Government buying in to an urban myth?

Model Flying New Zealand (MFNZ) is concerned that the Government is buying in to urban myths about drones.

MFNZ represents responsible flyers of model aircraft including drones, with all members required to pass a test before taking to the air in club flying zones.

“We welcome CAA’s new drone safety campaign but we are concerned that CAA is overstating the risk to the public” says MFNZ secretary Paul Clegg.

“We question the numbers they are working on. CAA’s latest research claims there are more than 175,000 drones and nearly 300,000 drone users in New Zealand. This is extrapolated from an online survey of 1400 people. A 2017 survey by the same research company was disputed, with a report for the Ministry of Transport estimating the figure to be closer to 77,000.”

<https://www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Import/Uploads/Air/Documents/03ee506069/04062019-Drone-Benefit-Study.pdf>

“Further, our conversations with the companies manufacturing and selling drones suggest the real number is much lower.”

“We also challenge the headline that ‘one in five drone users are flouting rules by flying in restricted air space’.”

What the research actually asked was whether people flew over suburbs or districts that may be classified as restricted airspace in parts. The researchers themselves acknowledge there may have been “some mismatch in users perception of the boundaries”.

The research also appears to be confusing Restricted Airspace and Control Zones, which have different requirements.

There are times when flying a drone in control zones is permitted, for example flying ‘shielded’ (inside or beside a structure) or if approved permission has been granted by Airways New Zealand. However the survey did not acknowledge this, simply presenting the questions in a yes or no format.

Of the 506 incidents reported to CAA in 2018, the majority of these (190 in 2018) relate to drones flying above people and property without their consent, followed by those operating in controlled airspace without clearance (67 in 2018) or within 4km of an aerodrome (60 in 2018).

In the United States, since 2010 the United States Federal Aviation Administration has recorded more than 112 turtle Vs aircraft collisions, and 1 drone Vs aircraft (a military helicopter which landed without incident).

“We agree that drones should not be flying in a way that puts people or aircraft at risk, but we warn against reinforcing the urban myth that this is a big problem.” We urge people thinking of flying drones to contact a MFNZ club in their area and learn to fly in a fun and safe environment.

MFNZ website: www.modelflyingnz.org

“On a positive note, we are pleased to see the research showing that overall, non-users are twice as likely to feel positively about the way drones are being used in New Zealand than negatively.”

<https://www.aviation.govt.nz/assets/about-us/news/New-Zealand-drone-research-2020.pdf>

“We support safe and enjoyable recreational drone flying, and we note that there are huge potential benefits in this technology.

“For example, firefighters, search and rescue and farmers are already using drones to expand their field of vision. Recreational model aircraft are used in many facets of STEM educational programmes and have been proven to be the start point for many aviation careers.”

“We urge the authorities and media not to beat up the risks at the expense of the benefits,” says Mr Clegg.

For further information contact MFNZ Secretary Paul Clegg Phone 021 986 566.