

# Fly Neighbourly at Remote Landing Areas

We are lucky to be able to access many parts of our country by aircraft. But operating in and out of these landing areas needs some thought and consideration.

Let's look at some considerations for operating neighbourly. As with any aircraft operation, plan to make sure the flight is conducted safely for you, your passengers, and any neighbouring properties. It should also be friendly to animals and the environment.

## Planning

As always, thoroughly prepare yourself, and your aircraft, fixed-wing or helicopter, for airstrip or helipad operations.

It is always advisable to talk to the property owners as well as any adjacent property owner, and advise your intentions – date, time and purpose.

Obtain their approval to use the area.

If you have to change your plans, contact the airstrip/helipad owner with the revised options. They can then advise neighbours and stock managers of any changes to your operating times.

If you intend to use private property to land on, or use any other part of the property, apart from an emergency forced landing, this action can be declared as trespassing.

Other areas such as Department of Conservation sites, including public camp sites, may be available for private aircraft

operation subject to approval. A briefing on the landing areas, including local weather conditions and hazards, is often available as part of the approval.

A recent incident had a helicopter landing among campers. This created a hazard to people on the ground. There was also the possibility of a tent being caught in the rotor wash and striking the tail rotor or main rotor.

If the pilot had called the campground for approval to operate there, he would have received advice on a suitable landing area located nearby that is free of hazards.

Ben Walters, CAA Flight Operations Inspector Helicopters, is a very experienced pilot and instructor. He says that all helicopter pilots are trained for confined area operations and have a mental checklist to use in these areas.

“The main requirement for safe and successful flight operations is planning.

“The high/low recce is the most valuable tool for a pilot to determine if the intended spot is the safest and most efficient. From a top view, the pilot can quickly assess the spot for size, shape, surface, and slope. You can also see hazards and any stock or people. Noise can scare stock, but alert people.

Photo courtesy of Betty Shepherd.

“Then, having assessed the wind strength and direction, you can set up the approach. You’re now looking for a clear approach and departure path, and are constantly checking for wind and wires.

“A power check is needed to make sure you can hover at the site and have sufficient power to climb out on a missed approach, or after landing,” said Ben.

If you have remote airstrip or helipad flight experience, review your previous training and experiences. Gather information on the airstrip/helipad dimensions, and fixed hazards such as operating area surface condition, obstacles, terrain, and the location of wires and other obstructions.

And if you have not flown into a remote area landing site before, get suitable training from a qualified flight instructor. Talk to local pilots and get their tips for flying in the area. Ask about where to park the aircraft, and if commercial operators use the area.

## Neighbours

More and more people want to live in remote areas. They enjoy the isolation and their environment, but do not always enjoy the intrusion of vehicles, including aircraft, shattering the silence. Low-flying, noisy aircraft dropping unexpectedly into their paddocks does not help.

Good airmanship and best practice will help you and your neighbours to get along. This requires you to think about how your flying will affect their lives. It might mean making sure you stay well away from buildings and especially animals.

Fly conservatively. Fly your inspection higher and slower to give you time to fully assess the surrounding area. Make all your decisions based on your planning and what you see when arriving overhead.

## Arriving

Roger Shepherd, CAA Investigating Officer, is an experienced pilot who often flies into remote areas. He shares some thoughts and ideas for safe operation, including the arrival on site.

“I always fly an overhead inspection, looking carefully for wires and visible obstacles such as terrain, fences, tracks, and objects on the strip/pad surface. I also get any passengers to look outside the aircraft and tell me if they see any people, buildings, animals, or obstacles. This is a good time to assess the wind strength and direction.

“Plan the approach and landing with an allowance for a possible missed approach and overshoot, or unexpected obstacles on the landing. Self-brief for these possibilities and stick to the plan,” said Roger.

This is a professional approach to risk management that you can adopt. It also shows those on the ground watching your arrival that you have the situation under control. They will feel better, and you will too.

## Departing

When ready to depart, and before engine start, you and your passengers should walk down the strip/pad, and any side areas, looking for people, hidden obstacles and especially stock. Stray sheep and trampers have been known to disrupt a takeoff.

The walking inspection is also a good time to check the operating environment. You can see the surface conditions, assess obstacles, and plan the departure. You need to think about a decision point to abort the takeoff and stop in the remaining distance available.

After start, and when lined up, self-brief the takeoff, including engine failure considerations.

During the takeoff roll/liftoff, check again for hazards and intruders. Your departure path should be established to keep you clear of sensitive areas, but not at the expense of safe aircraft performance.

Like any unusual or different flying situation, you can relax only when the aircraft is parked and the hangar doors are closed.

Thoughtful, considered planning will help you enjoy the flying experience. Maybe it will help the neighbours to enjoy it too. ■

