

Another way to board a ferry

An RNZAF Iroquois supported the NZ Police Special Tactics Group in support of an exercise in Cook Strait last month. The 10.00am sailing of the Interislander ferry from Picton to Wellington on Friday 16 May set the scene for a combined police STG and RNZAF 3 Squadron counter-terrorism training exercise.

The routine training, involving fast rope rappelling, saw members of the police STG rappel from an RNZAF Iroquois onto the deck of the Aratere Interislander ferry as it made its way across Cook Strait. Iroquois captain Sqn Ldr Nigel Cooper of 3 Squadron said the exercise was a great success and the RNZAF achieved its aim, which was getting the team on board the ship. He said the combined exercise provided the Iroquois crew with the opportunity to practise fast rope rappelling during a realistic training situation.

Interislander passengers and crew had been well briefed by the police and RNZAF prior to the training exercise.



Members of the police Special Tactics Group rappel out of an RNZAF Iroquois to board the Aratere Interislander ferry during a combined training exercise. It is not known whether they were asked to produce tickets.

More Italian helicopters coming

Helicopters New Zealand (HNZ) has signed a contract for an additional three AW139 medium twin-turbine helicopters, plus options for a further two, from AgustaWestland. These helicopters, which add to two AW139s previously purchased with the first aircraft ZK-HNZ already in service and based in New Plymouth, will be used for offshore transport purposes.

The acquisition of new AW139s will enable HNZ to further increase its ability to further expand its support of leading companies such as Shell, confirming HNZ as the prime offshore operator in the region. The company says the next two deliveries, in September and December this year, will be used for the Woodside Burrup offshore Pluto LNG Project based at Karratha, Western Australia. HNZ has an initial three-year contract in Karratha and says it is "very pleased" to have won this contract. The fourth AW139 will be delivered in December 2009 with the rest to follow.

With the largest cabin in its class and high safety, reliability and serviceability levels, the AW139 is also fully compliant with the stringent operational and quality requirements

of Shell Aviation and Woodside Burrup, as well as meeting the safety and systems requirements of the new generation aircraft for the oil companies in the western world. HNZ will also provide maintenance and technical services to the expanding fleet of AW139 in the region.

Brian McDonald, HNZ CEO, says the company has experienced growing success in recent years and the state-of-the-art AW139 helicopter has played a major role in pursuing its goals.

HNZ manager Denis Laird says the AW139's features have further enhanced the company's ability to satisfying its customers' needs which are proving more and more demanding. "Offering our customers increased effectiveness by further strengthening the AW139 fleet which supported them to reach their targets is the best answer we can provide to fit their new expectations."

Orders for almost 350 AW139 helicopters have been placed so far by almost 100 customers from nearly 40 countries for a wide variety of applications.

Increasing biofuel focus

Air New Zealand's deputy chief executive, Norm Thompson, is reported by the *New Zealand Herald* to have said at the annual Trenz tourism conference in Rotorua that his airline was increasing its focus on biofuel, which could cost less than half the barrel price of regular fuel.

"We are absolutely committed to this. We have a goal within the organisation to get to a point where we can run all or part of our domestic fleet on second-generation biofuels. It is happening quicker than we had planned, with reports of some of the domestic fleet being converted within five years. When you have got the price of jet fuel at US\$172 it gives a lot of incentive."

Mr Thompson went on to say fuel cost increases meant that, for a flight from Los Angeles to Auckland, fuel had gone from being 30 percent of the cost to the airline to 70 percent. In the past two months Air New Zealand had increased its customer fuel surcharge twice — a total increase of 6 percent.

He said it was hard to predict how much money Air New Zealand would save by using biofuel, but it could be "close to half" the current cost of jet fuel. While it was too soon to put a date on when it would start using biofuel in the fleet, sometime in the next five years was the goal, he said.

There was still a lot of work to be done and the fuel would have to be available at a range of airports across the world before it would consider using it for long-haul. "When you go down the biofuel track you have to be sure of supply."

Mr Thompson said the biofuel Air New Zealand intended to test would be either a second-generation biofuel based on a crop called jatropha or an algae-based biofuel it was working on with several New Zealand companies, and this was planned to be tested

on a B747-400 before the end of the year on one engine, with the test being planned in conjunction with Rolls-Royce.

The jatropha bush produces seeds with a high oil content and is sourced from China and India where it is grown on scrubland unsuitable for food crops. But long-term, the airline hoped to source biofuel from New Zealand. Air New Zealand has said early work showed biofuels cost about half the price of normal aviation fuel and produced only 50 per cent of the environmental emissions.

Qantas cuts back

The Qantas Group has responded to continuing high fuel prices with a range of cost-saving measures including the cancellation of five percent of available seat kilometres (ASKs), the equivalent of grounding six aircraft. Qantas CEO Geoff Dixon says the airline's fuel bill is expected increase by more than \$2 billion in 2008/09, or around 35 per cent of the company's total expenditure.

"The fact is that fuel prices are something we have no control over, so we have to look harder at areas where we do have control. Despite our fuel hedging strategy, fuel surcharges, two separate across-the-board fare increases and a recruitment freeze, we are not bridging the widening gap between the actual increase in the cost of fuel and the amount we offset."

Qantas will manage the reduction in ASKs by retiring one B737 aircraft, grounding two B767s and one Jetstar A320, cancelling the delivery of one Jetstar A321, accelerating the retirement of its four B747-300s which currently operate trans-continental services to Perth, all by December; and adjusting the flying patterns of other aircraft, including reducing the utilisation of the B747-400 fleet.



New helicopter project underway

The contract signing between the New Zealand Government and AgustaWestland for the new training and light utility helicopters took place on 8 May and marks another step in the building of New Zealand's military capability. The \$139 million contract, for five AW109 LUH (NZ) helicopters, spares, onboard equipment and a simulator, "will see RNZAF rotary wing training capabilities become world-class," said Chief of Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Graham Lintott.

The AW109 LUH (NZ) helicopters will be used for training pilots and aircrew who will later fly the NH90 medium utility helicopter and SH-2G Seasprite naval helicopter, and to perform lighter helicopter missions. "The capabilities of the AW109 will see it used in a number of training and light utility roles, contributing to the air force's ability to meet the government's requirements," said Air Vice-Marshal Lintott.

Work to build the helicopters will begin immediately at the AgustaWestland facilities

near Milan, Italy, in consultation with personnel from the RNZAF and the Ministry of Defence. The aircraft are scheduled to enter service in 2011 and will be part of 3 Squadron located at RNZAF Base Ohakea.

The Agusta A 109 Power series of helicopters had its first flight in August 1970 and was first delivered in May 1976. This helicopter has come along way since, and the military version is now leading the sales.

The AW109 LUH is powered by two Turbomeca Arrius 2K2 turboshaft engines rated at 711shp each and allowing for hot-and-high performance. Its modern glass cockpit and retractable wheeled undercarriage are optimised for use in military training and light utility tasks.

It has two pilot seats and a maximum of six seats in the rear cabin, but in RNZAF service will normally have a crew of two pilots and one helicopter crewman, although this may vary depending on the complexity of the task being undertaken.



Phil Smith, AgustaWestland Australia general manager (left), Minister of Defence Phil Goff and Secretary of Defence John McKinnon sign the contract for five AW109 LUH helicopters on 8 May.

CAA investigations, prosecutions need separation

The Aviation Industry Association of NZ (Inc), representing the aviation community, has come out strongly against the CAA's merging last year of its Safety Investigation and Analysis Unit (SIU) with the Prosecuting Unit. At the time, assurances were given that the two units would continue to operate as they had in the past and there would be no sharing of information or meaningful dialogue, and the assurances appeared then to be sufficient.

But the unsuccessful prosecution of a Devon pilot involved in an accident at Ohakea suggests otherwise. The defence proved that the cause of the crash was due to a flap asymmetry mechanical fault rather than pilot error, but information the pilot gave willingly to the CAA in good faith to help with its "no blame" safety investigation was used in evidence against him.

AIA CEO Irene King says, "It is all too easy to apportion blame to an individual such as a pilot or engineer when instead other complex factors can be the true causes. In this instance, if there had been a comprehensive, rather than cursory, investigation the cause of the accident would have been established."

Expressing concern that a number of very salient accident investigation principles had been compromised, she says, "It is far too easy under the investigatory system we have in New Zealand for the 'safety agency', in this case the CAA, to initiate a prosecution. New Zealand's practices are inconsistent and out

of line with the international aviation safety regime — ICAO.

"New Zealand's system revolves around the gamekeeper and poacher being one and the same, except where the Transport Accident Investigation Commission decides to investigate.

"We were absolutely astounded to hear the CAA Director commenting to the media that the CAA was compliant with international standards and practices. The simple matter is that we are not and have not been for some time. ICAO in its most recent audit of the CAA issued a finding to that effect and the CAA submitted a plan, which ICAO subsequently accepted, for possible legislative change."

Ms King says the aviation industry wants immediate separation of the safety investigation and prosecution arms of the CAA. "The government should fund CAA prosecutions, not the present levy on passengers. Fines should be used to promote aviation safety and not go into the Consolidated Fund.

"ICAO practices need to be adhered to. Only when this happens will there be any hope that New Zealanders can reap the benefits of high-quality aviation safety investigation and analysis of causal factors. This system is entirely reliant on open, honest and transparent recording of information.

"Using that information for the purposes of prosecution will cause that system to close down and we will all be the losers."