

AITP Press Release

First-of-its-Kind Flight Trials Integrate Uncrewed Aircraft Into Controlled Airspace

A partnership of aviation leaders demonstrates that uncrewed aircraft can be safely integrated into controlled airspace among piloted aircraft through multiple test flights

CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND and MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA - - DECEMBER 5, 2023 - - A partnership of aviation leaders has successfully completed a first-of-its-kind trial, including a series of test flights aimed at evaluating the operational integration of uncrewed aircraft flying beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) into controlled airspace. The successful completion of these trial test flights in New Zealand demonstrates that safe, uncrewed flight operations are possible, today, in controlled airspace among other piloted aircraft.

Through this trial program, the partnership has established a safe process for uncrewed aircraft to access controlled airspace and created a significant new understanding and capability for commercial autonomous flight operations. The trials offer key insights for regulators and industry players globally to facilitate further testing and inform rule-making.

Led by [Wisk Aero](#), the trials included the New Zealand Government and industry partners, including [Insitu Pacific](#) as the approved Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) operator, the [Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand](#) (CAA) as the regulatory observer and Part 102 approver, [Airways New Zealand](#) as the air navigation service provider alongside [Airways International's uncrewed traffic management \(UTM\) system AirShare](#), and indigenous-led aerospace venture, [Tāwhaki](#), providing the flight testing site.

The latest test flights were part of Wisk's multi-phased testing programme under the New Zealand Government's Airspace Integration Trial Programme (AITP). This latest phase of testing involved multiple flights that took place between November 17 and December 1, 2023, which demonstrated that a RPA can be operated under instrument flight rules (IFR) in controlled airspace and integrated with regular crewed traffic. The flights took place at the Tāwhaki National Aerospace Centre at Kaitorete, involving take-offs, landings, and uncontrolled and controlled airspace navigation.

"The successful completion of this phase of testing demonstrates that it is possible to safely integrate autonomous aircraft into controlled airspace that is shared with piloted aircraft," said Catherine MacGowan, Wisk's Vice President of APAC and Air Operations. "The processes, data, and learnings from these trial flights will help shape the future of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and the broader aviation industry."

Andrew Duggan, Managing Director of Insitu Pacific, said: "This series of flights, remotely-piloted by our Insitu Pacific operators, puts into action the significant planning and close collaboration we have undertaken to support Wisk, and their partners the NZ CAA and Airways NZ, in this evolutionary program. The successful demonstration serves as a foundation towards fielding a safe concept of operations for autonomous flight in non-segregated airspace into the future."

Airways New Zealand's Acting General Manager Air Traffic Services, James Evans, said: "Our purpose as New Zealand's air navigation service provider is to keep our skies safe, today and tomorrow. We value the chance to work with an innovator like Wisk to help shape the future by supporting it to trial the safe integration of uncrewed aerial vehicles into our controlled airspace."

Justine Whitfield, Head of Products (Digital) at Airways International, said: "It's great to be part of this trial with Wisk and see Advanced Air Mobility flights in action in AirShare using the UTM digital ecosystem. This trial with AITP partners will generate learnings that help inform safe uncrewed aircraft airspace integration models."

CAA's Deputy Chief Executive, Aviation Safety, David Harrison, said: "CAA is committed to the safe and secure integration of emerging technologies into the civil aviation system in New Zealand. It's a promising step forward for the whole sector that these trials have progressed safely, which is our number one priority."

Tāwhaki CEO, Linda Falwasser, said: “We’re proud to support world-leading innovation to take flight from our Tāwhaki National Aerospace Centre at Kaitorete. It’s great to be working in partnership as part of the Airspace Integration Trials Programme to chart a path for an adaptive, exciting, sustainable future for aerospace transport.”

The New Zealand Government Airspace Integration Trials Programme (AITP) was announced in 2019 and is a four-year, world-first programme to ensure airspace systems maintain exceptional levels of safety while balancing aviation advancements, community expectations (social and environmental), and realising economic benefits. Wisk was the first industry partner in the programme and has been undertaking multiple phases of testing since becoming the first to sign an MOU with the New Zealand government in 2020.

About Wisk

Wisk is an Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) company dedicated to delivering safe, everyday flight for everyone. Wisk’s self-flying, eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing) air taxi will make it possible for passengers to skip the traffic and get to their destination faster. Wisk is a fully-owned Boeing subsidiary and is headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area, with locations around the world. With over a decade of experience and over 1700+ test flights, Wisk is shaping the future of daily commutes and urban travel, safely and sustainably. Learn more about Wisk [here](#).

About Insitu Pacific

Located in Brisbane, Australia Insitu Pacific was established in 2009 as a division of Insitu Inc and serves defence customers across the Asia-Pacific region and global commercial customers. We utilise expert in-house knowledge and skills to deliver trusted and proven uncrewed aircraft systems and end-to-end solutions for collecting, processing and managing sensor data. To date, Insitu systems have accumulated more than 1.4 million flight hours. Insitu Pacific is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Boeing Company.

About CAA

The Civil Aviation Authority regulates aviation in New Zealand to keep the skies safe and secure. The Authority has established an Emerging Technologies Programme (ETP) to act as a bridge between the CAA and emerging technologies aerospace and aviation stakeholders and innovators. Learn more about the ETP [here](#).

About Airways New Zealand

Airways New Zealand provides air traffic management services in the domestic New Zealand Flight Information Region and across our international Auckland Oceanic Flight Information Region – one of the largest airspace regions in the world. We control the air traffic in 30 million square kilometres of airspace over New Zealand, the South Pacific and Southern Oceans and the Tasman Sea, from 5 degrees south of the equator to Antarctica. Our core role is to manage air traffic safely and efficiently, and to invest in the infrastructure and the people to support it. We employ about 800 valued staff in highly skilled roles. Our people work across our Auckland and Christchurch air traffic control centres, 19 towers and corporate offices in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Find out more at www.airways.co.nz

About AirShare

AirShare is an uncrewed traffic management (UTM) system to help air navigation service providers and regulators safely and efficiently manage uncrewed aircraft (UA) traffic. Since its launch in 2014 AirShare has enabled UA access to airspace, supported situational awareness, and reduced airspace managers’ workload via automation. AirShare has been developed by Airways International Ltd, the commercial arm of Airways New Zealand. For more information about AirShare, visit <https://airwaysinternational.com/airshare-utm/>

About Tāwhaki

[Tāwhaki](#) provides one of the world’s best locations to test, take flight and discover new horizons. Tāwhaki is a joint aerospace venture between Kaitorete mana whenua – Te Taumutu Rūnanga and Wairewa Rūnanga – and the New Zealand Government. Since its formation in 2021, it has established the country’s first National Aerospace Centre at Kaitorete, 50 minutes’ drive from Ōtautahi Christchurch CBD, hosting multiple users across the advanced aviation and aerospace spectrum. In early 2024, Tāwhaki will be enabling horizontal space launch with a new sealed runway. It’s partnership between mana whenua and the Crown, and its weaving together of mātauranga Māori (indigenous knowledge) and cutting-edge innovation in aerospace and environmental rejuvenation, is world-leading and unique.

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