



PORTVILA

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## Media Release

# Flying Drones – Keep it Safe

There has been much discussion and potentially misleading information recently on social media around flying drones in Vanuatu, with a great deal of speculation and assumption being shared.

Acting Director, Mrs Naiany Karu Civil Aviation Authority Vanuatu (CAAV) says that “CAAV supports the use of drones in Vanuatu, but wants everyone to make sure they are used safely. While a small drone may seem harmless, it is still an aircraft with the potential to cause damage to other aircraft as well as people and property on the ground or on the water. CAAV is responsible for setting the standards that balance the risks of operating drones in Vanuatu to achieve reasonable levels of safety that align with manned aviation.”

“To support the safe use of drones in Vanuatu, the CAAV is developing regulations, to make it clearer who can fly what, when and where. These regulations will be circulated for a second round of consultation shortly.”

“Until the specific rules are established, drone operators need to know that they are ‘pilots’ and that they are flying ‘aircraft’ and must at all times obey the aviation regulations of Vanuatu.” The pilot in command of an aircraft (a drone) is responsible for the safe operation of the aircraft in flight and is responsible for compliance with all relevant prescribed requirements (CAA Act 2006 S13(a) and (c)). Further, a person operating an aircraft in a careless, dangerous, or not properly approved manner can be fined (fines of up to 800,000VUV for individuals, CAA Act Part 6 Div 1).

Mrs Karu also points out that it is not just CAAV which has responsibilities for how, where and when drones can be operated. To be safe, a drone operator also needs the approval of the landowner (or property manager) for the land they wish to fly over; which might include Municipalities, the Harbour Master and Private landowners. In some instances, where a drone is fitted with a camera, there may be other agency approvals required for cultural, privacy and security requirements.

Rather than forbidding the use of drones, the former Director Joseph Niel, in 2016, sought help from interested parties to find alternative means of compliance for drone operators to help them to learn how to, and facilitate, safer operations.

Mrs Karu says that “CAAV has relied entirely on voluntary support to share information around drone operations to date, and we appreciate that there are committed aviators out there willing to help build this industry safely.” In particular, Mrs Karu notes that “the VKS website [www.drone.vu](http://www.drone.vu) is one way volunteers have stepped up. This website manages VKS media requirements for drones, while also supporting drone operators to understand the rules and assists in working with people to ensure that they are operating safely (or if they need to approach CAAV for more detailed assessment).”

Mrs Karu cautions that some of the social media advice circulating recently contains false and misleading information and could be risky to follow. Also, the overseas websites and apps being shared are often not funded to provide valid information for Vanuatu and could be dangerous to rely on. Mrs Karu does refer drone pilots to the Drone Log Book service (also available with a Drone.Vu registration) as a useful tool to



drone pilots to keep adequate records of their flights. Until the regulations come into being, CAAV recommends following world's best practice. This will ensure that you remain compliant and safe.

Mrs Karu emphasises that the standard operating conditions currently approved by CAAV are:

- “All operations must be in Visual Line of Sight of the operator, i.e. you must have eyes on the drone and the surrounding airspace at all times
- Stay under 400ft (120m)
- Stay out of the way of manned aircraft
- Do not fly over buildings or people
- Remain more than 30 m away from other people not involved with the operation at all times
- Only fly during daytime
- Have the landowner's/property manager's permission
- Stay more than 4km away from ANY airport
- Only use drones that weigh less than 25kg”

Mrs Karu reminds drone owners that if they want to do any flying that is outside of these conditions, they will need to talk to CAAV to find out if they can, and how to, make sure they keep their operation safe and compliant.

Mr Manfred Veremiato, an Airworthiness Officer with the CAAV, says that “local experience in Vanuatu is also important, such as knowing to:

- Keep clear of the Helicopter Pontoon at Port Vila harbour (in fact any flights over the harbour need both the Harbour Masters and Vanuatu Helicopters approvals)
- Remember that flying on Mystery Island is unsafe, as the whole Island is an airport.
- Keep clear of Cruise Ships
- In Port Vila, stay clear of the Port Vila TMA (<https://maps.vu/airspace/port-vila-tma>)
- Be mindful that winds can be unpredictable, or stronger around mountains and cliffs
- Be respectful of cultural requirements and others privacy”

CAAV Says

“Fly Safe and Respectfully - Safe and Secure Skies Prosper Vanuatu”