



TAKING TO THE SKIES

Army RPAS Project Update

Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) are an increasingly common technology in New Zealand and around the world.

The Army will be acquiring an RPAS capability as part of the ISR/EW component of the Network Enabled Army (NEA) Programme. In order to ensure it is ready to receive RPAS capability a project has been established to develop our RPAS policies and processes.

The aim of the project is to experiment with the policies and processes that have been developed so far and identify any areas that need to be adjusted or improved. Ultimately the intent is to establish a culture within the Army of safe and professional use of RPAS, where their use becomes “business as usual”.

The best way to test and adjust policies and processes is to use them for real. For this project it means getting the Army flying RPAS. In conjunction with the NEA, the Army has acquired a number of commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) RPAS for units to use in support of project aims.

The DJI Mavic Pro has been selected as the preferred COTS RPAS for the duration of the project. Units that

have trained RPAS operators and have also met the requirements detailed in the Army’s Flying Management System (FMS) are able to use the Mavic Pro in line within the limitations detailed in the Mavic Pro Permit to Operate issued by the RNZAF.

Massey University’s School of Aviation is working with the Army to provide RPAS education and certification on the Mavic Pro.

The school has a three-day RPAS Operators Course, which teaches students the basics of using RPAS safely. The course has a two-day theory component, which covers the civilian rules and regulations for RPAS, as well as a one-day practical component, where students’ competency as a quadcopter RPAS operator is tested.

Those students who pass both components are given their quadcopter RPAS “wings” and certification by Massey University.

The course is a civilian recognised qualification and is endorsed by the New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Currently the Army has about 100 personnel who have passed the theory portion of the course and about 40 personnel have completed both components. It is anticipated that by early 2018 most of the remainder will have undertaken the practical test and will have their wings.



The team on the operator’s course.

The project aims to have finalised the Army’s RPAS policies and processes by December 2018. By that time the Army will have made great strides in making the safe and professional use of RPAS “business as usual”.

Questions regarding this project should be directed to the Army’s Staff Officer RPAS, Major Grant Palmer in Army General Staff.



BRIG Chris Parsons with a RPAS unit.