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UAVNZ calls for evidence-based regulation, not politically driven deregulation

UAVNZ, the Commercial Drone Industry Association of New Zealand, is calling on the Government to explain why it is pursuing agricultural drone deregulation contrary to the recommendations of its own transport officials and aviation industry experts.

Documents released under the Official Information Act reveal that the Ministry of Transport recommended a streamlined certification pathway that would reduce regulatory burdens while retaining essential safety safeguards, including mandatory training, approved aircraft and regulatory oversight.

Instead, the Government announced a notification-only approach, proposing to remove operator certification without introducing fundamental aviation safety measures such as pilot licensing.

UAVNZ Chair Chris Jackson says removing certification without introducing licensing creates a significant regulatory enforcement gap.

“Under the Civil Aviation Act 2023, certification and licensing mean the Civil Aviation Authority knows exactly who holds an aviation document. Holders must meet ongoing obligations, be subject to oversight and enforcement action if needed.

“A notification-only system would allow agricultural drone operators to operate commercially without either an operator certificate or a pilot licence. This would significantly weaken CAA’s ability to intervene proactively, hold operators to account and prevent unsafe practices from continuing.

“Removing certification does not remove the risks — it removes some of the regulator's most effective tools for managing them.”

Parliamentary questions have further revealed that, as of 15 September 2026, no papers relating to agricultural drone regulation had been considered by Cabinet or any Cabinet committee.

Mr Jackson says these revelations raise serious questions about the quality of the Government's decision-making.

“The Minister received clear advice from his own officials, supported by the aviation industry, recommending a practical solution that reduced bureaucracy without compromising safety. That advice appears to have been disregarded.”

“We have seen no evidence that the Minister investigated the consequences of his preferred approach before announcing it. If the Government has evidence supporting its decision, it should release it.”

UAVNZ strongly supports regulatory modernisation but warns against confusing deregulation with genuine reform.

“Smarter regulation means removing unnecessary costs and complexity while maintaining accountability and safety standards. It does not mean removing competency requirements and oversight and simply hoping nothing goes wrong.”

These concerns are compounded by the CAA's existing approach to oversight of the unmanned aircraft sector. Routine proactive monitoring of Part 102 operators is limited, with the regulator relying heavily on initial certification and responding to reported incidents and complaints rather than regularly assessing operators' ongoing compliance and safety practices.

The concerns echo those previously raised by the Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand (AIANZ), which has warned that agricultural drone reform must retain appropriate training, certification and safety oversight.

“This is not an industry resisting change. It is an industry asking the Government to listen to the evidence, its own officials and the aviation experts who understand the risks.”

UAVNZ urges drone operators, farmers, industry participants and the public to support the parliamentary petition opposing the notification-only pathway and calling for meaningful, evidence-based regulatory reform.

Support the parliamentary petition:

https://petitions.parliament.nz/3ae388bb-b3e9-4f40-261a-08df030c67ff?lang=en

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