

Airport Aviation Operators and Resident Tenants
C/- P O Box 125
MOTUEKA

25 January 2005

Mr R G Dickinson
Chief Executive
Tasman District Council
Private Bag
RICHMOND

Dear Mr Dickinson

RE: Concerns Regarding Compromising Safety of Aircraft Operations Due to Drag Race Events

The following is a submission that the Airport Aviation Operators and Resident Tenants would like to be submitted on the agenda for the Special Council Meeting to be held on 3rd February 2005.

PURPOSE/REASON FOR THE SUBMISSION

To provide a balance of information to Councillors over the Drag Racing issue.

When considering the issue of whether to rescind the decision of the Council Enterprises Subcommittee (**FN04/12/28**) to discontinue Drag Racing at Motueka Airport, we request that you consider the following points, remembering that the core issue has been raised as a result of a serious accident, which affected private property and injured members of the public.

If the decision is to allow drag racing, then before any events occur, the outstanding safety issues must be resolved.

DRAG RACING ORIGINAL RESOURCE CONSENT RM980181

Acknowledges airport policy is to ***“permit multi-functional use of areas not required for aerodrome uses where these do not conflict with aerodrome operations”***.

Also points out ***“From the suggestion that consent should only be given for a period of three years, the inference is taken that staff have doubts as to whether the adverse affect can be adequately controlled.”***

Also ***“Other issues were safety beyond the finishing point of the race...”***. ***“The safety issues are well covered by the rules of the New Zealand Drag Racing Association”***. This implies that these rules were such that the last serious accident would not have occurred if the Nelson Drag Racing Association complied with them.

RISK ASSESSMENT REPORT DATED 13 AUGUST 2004 COMMISSIONED BY TASMAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Quote from the McGregor and Co Report: 4.3.1 Drag Racing

“We gather that one of the main reasons for initially accepting drag racing on the aerodrome was financial – income. This reason may not still apply as we gather the aerodrome is now capable of being financially self sufficient without relying on non-aeronautical activities. Regardless Drag Racing should only be permitted if the overall costs to the district are less than the benefits. This includes the potential cost (to the district) of fatal injuries, damage to property as well as the additional operating costs such as activities required to ensure that risk levels remain at acceptable or low levels.”

“Notwithstanding this, however it is clear that an incident directly related to drag racing is likely to occur on the airfield. Whilst drag racing appears to meet the rules of the Association in terms of safety one would expect strict functional supervision and additional safeguards (such as greater crowd control to avoid conflict with aviation operations) to be evident. Furthermore, the runway sweep to collect debris, clearly, is not working and would need to be fixed if drag racing continued. The legal and political implications of a serious incident happening on the aerodrome need to be considered by Council.”

“Drag Racing poses an (bordering on) extreme level of inherent risk”

MOTUEKA AIRPORT AVIATION OPERATOR ISSUES

Damage and Debris

It has been made very clear that, despite our attempts to bring to the attention of Council, our concerns over damage to the seal and grass runways, and debris being left, that not enough is being done to satisfactorily eliminate these very serious concerns.

This must be addressed in a way that it can be guaranteed that there is no risk to aircraft after any Drag Racing event from debris or damage to the sealed or grass runways.

Airport Must Remain Open

If the drag racing is to continue, the Airport **must remain open** for the resident operators. The agreement of the Aviation Operators at the outset was very important and was on the basis of the grass runway remaining open. Of course none of us could foresee the disruption that has since resulted. It is of course stating the obvious that had a crystal ball been available, we would not be in the current situation. The Nelson Drag Racing

Association would have found a different venue, which is what we suggest needs to be done if they are looking long term.

It has been proven that simultaneous operations can be successfully carried out, however, as the airport continues to grow this is not a long-term solution.

Simultaneous activities were not a contributing factor to the current situation.

Results of Airport Closure

The aviation operators have a potential loss of turnover in the order of \$20,000 per day, along with loss of reputation and credibility with tour operators, Awaroa Lodge, Heaphy Track Operators, backpacker bus tours etc, and no guarantee of being able to book for the "rain day". Also up to 20 staff off work for the day. These are very serious consequences.

Financial

To quote from the risk assessment report:

"Drag Racing should only be permitted if the overall costs to the district are less than the benefits".

It is disappointing that the magnitude of the costs related directly to the drag events are continually overlooked. Consider the cost involved in Risk Assessments, staff time, MWH fees, runway repairs etc. Even though the Airport account is on the positive it would be in a far better position financially if Drag Racing was not occurring.

The failure of the Nelson Drag Racing Association to pay the agreed \$20,000 is worth noting, as we believe it is an untenable situation where even now, in writing, the Tasman District Council are being held almost to the point of being blackmailed by the Nelson Drag Racing Association in that, and to quote John Gourdie "with a further \$20,000 pending a favourable outcome". (See Cr T Norriss's report).

Continually Cr Norriss as facilitator of the project assured that no work would start on the runway upgrade until the Drag Racing Contribution of \$20,000 had been received.

If Council feels that further drag racing at the airport is possible, then we believe that money in full must surely have to be paid prior to any further activity.

Also the Aviation Operators were continually assured that in no way would any additional cost be passed on to the Airport other than the original amount to chip seal the runway of \$33,000.

If the Council Enterprises Subcommittee decision is rescinded, we believe a process must be put in place to ensure a rigorous evaluation of the mitigation processes and adequate consultation with stakeholders should take place prior to any further events.

CR T NORRISS'S REPORT

It is important when reading this report to note that a lot of personal opinion is presented as being objective, and without reading all of the minutes of all of the meetings, any isolated quote is not necessarily the whole story.

The last paragraph on the first page suggests that the surplus of approx \$17,000 must in a large part be due to Nelson Drag Racing Association. In fact, without the costs associated with the drag events, runway widening, MHW fees etc, this surplus would likely be far more. And of course the outstanding \$20,000 is not mentioned. The Airport Operators were very frustrated that the surplus of the Airport Account of \$17,000 in terms of year-end surplus was used for the benefit of Drag Racing on a project they opposed. Clearly the costs associated with Drag Racing at the Airport has already far exceeded income from that source, and will never be recovered. The Airport under the current operating budget will be a good asset to the Council and the future is bright with continuing aviation orientated projects planned.

On page two, **Background**, the trial event was run on the basis that the racing would stop for any aircraft taking off or landing. The trial was approved in no small part because all the operators agreed on that basis. Specifically the grass runway remained open.

Cr Norriss conveniently notes, "none of the users at the airport opposed the application". This is correct, as the agreement was that the grass runway remained open, and racing would stop for any aircraft take off or landing, which on weekends was not a lot. We acknowledge that this may have changed, but that was the original agreement, and of course it is an airport, and aviation activity is growing.

Page three includes a rundown on how funding for the widening was found, including of course the yet to be paid and now held as *incentive* \$20,000. Also it is important to note that purported \$45,000 invested by the Nelson Drag Racing Association for the concrete pad was just that and not anything to do with the operation of the airport.

It should be noted that Cr Norriss confirms that **none** of the aircraft operators supported the widening of the runway.

Cr Norriss's comments on page 4 stating Skydiving was not to occur on drag racing days are misleading. The fact is that applied for a trial period only and an approval has been issued to Skydive Abel Tasman to operate 7 days a week on 15th March 2002.

Also on page four Cr Norriss mentions the last accident. There has been a lot of misinformation regarding this, and as yet no official report has been made available. However, it has been said the brake parachute failed. This is not correct. Also it wasn't the first time a race vehicle had ended up in the fence. This time the Drag car was stopped by hitting a spectator's car parked outside the airport. The occupants of that car were injured, and the car very badly damaged. That there were no fatalities was, as the Mayor stated on TV3, "a small miracle" as a large semi trailer truck had just gone past, and of course the Motueka Valley Road is quite busy.

Cr Norriss then questions the manner that the risk assessment was carried out. On what qualification or expertise does he base this criticism?

The Ford Driving School was a concern, correctly so, and it no longer operates at the airfield, due to that concern. We are not sure how the Drag Racing is different.

Cr Norriss suggests that as there have been serious accidents from aviation activities. Surely when looking at risk it is fair to say that there is a higher expectation and acceptance of Aircraft Related incidents. Airport governance must be far more at risk of recourse from a non-aviation activity at an airport.

Finally, to suggest that the Nelson Drag Racing Association indemnify the Tasman District Council is ignoring the issue of compromising safety of aircraft operations at the Motueka Airport, which as an airfield operator the Tasman District Council cannot do. Even if indemnity is obtained, how will the aviation operators be indemnified in the event of any accident as a result of Drag Racing at the Airport.

SUMMARY OF POINTS

1. The airport must be allowed to remain open for resident operators if drag racing is continued.
2. As operator of the airfield, the Tasman District Council has a duty to ensure that the airfield is maintained to ensure that safety of the aircraft operations is not compromised.
3. After every drag race meeting, there has been debris left on the seal and grass runways, despite a "sucker truck" being used and people spending time picking up rubbish.
4. Before any more drag racing is considered at the aerodrome, a 100% guaranteed solution to runway damage, and debris has to be developed.
5. The "widening" of the runway was carried out only for the drag club. None of the aircraft operators supported it.
6. The Nelson Drag Racing Association agreed to pay \$20,000 towards the cost of the project, and then reneged on this, as they were under threat of not being able to use the airfield again after the serious crash, which very nearly was a double fatality.
7. The only reason the operators who were there when the Nelson Drag Racing Association asked for a trial run, agreed, was that the grass runway would remain open, and the drag racing would be stopped as any aircraft took off or landed. The Nelson Drag Racing Association agreed to this.
8. The Nelson Drag Racing Association are offering to "indemnify the Tasman District Council" which is great, but what about the aviation community whose safety is at stake?
9. The Tasman District Council is in the process of tendering the upgrade of the grass runway and taxiway. When this work is completed, will the Tasman District Council be happy to risk serious damage to the grass runway each time the Nelson Drag Racing Association hold a meeting.
10. Continually the idea is put out that "it is just 4 afternoons a year". This is deliberately misleading. The fact is it is 4 whole days of the sealed runway being unavailable, and a further 4 days of uncertainty for the aircraft operations due to the Nelson Drag Racing Association's "rain day" (i.e 8 days per year we are affected), and all of this over the half of the year where the aircraft operators are busiest, which is almost a 5% reduction in potential earnings.

11. Income derived for the Tasman District Council from the drag meetings has been completely erased by the costs associated.
12. Long term there is no future for the Nelson Drag Racing Association at the Motueka airport, as the aircraft operations are slowly increasing, and another venue will need to be found. Surely it is time the Nelson Drag Racing Association and the Tasman District Council put some energy in to finding another venue.

CONCLUSION

If the Tasman District Council are able to satisfy all the safety and operational issues, then the aviation operators would be able to work together with all the stake holders to ensure that a reasonable compromise can be reached so that all parties can operate simultaneously.

Thank you for taking the time to read our submission.

Yours faithfully

On Behalf
Airport Aviation Operators and Resident Tenants

Airport Aviation Operators and Resident Tenants

K Broady
B & M Hane
P Hart
Abel Tasman Air (V & A D'Ath)
Motueka Aero Club (J Maguire – President)
Nelson Aviation College (P McKay)
Sky Dive Abel Tasman (S Bean)