

Wanaka, Tarras airport scenario 'improbable'

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29 March 2021, 6:06 AM

Local stakeholders have reacted to a statement by Christchurch International Airport Ltd (CIAL) that Wanaka Airport could not operate alongside an airport in Tarras. CIAL project director Michael Singleton made the comment to Tourism Ticker last week, after CIAL presented the Tarras community with an update on the proposal for an airport at Tarras.

The company bought 750 hectares of land near Tarras, at a cost of \$45m, to develop an airport.

CIAL committed to providing more information to the community in June this year on the potential runway alignment, flight path and noise output.

The airport would be 20 minutes from Wanaka Airport and about an hour and a half from Queenstown Airport.

Michael said two airports seemed "a really unlikely scenario".

"Nothing's impossible but it would be highly improbable because you've got some really simple things... that includes how your airspace is managed because you have approvals for your airspace – we don't write our own airspace, you have to have an approval for that. You've got a natural conflict in that," he said.

In response, Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC) chief executive Colin Keel told the Wanaka App there are already two airports serving the needs of the Queenstown Lakes district and broader region.

"Beyond that, it is our view that the lower South Island is well served by the four existing airports, now and well into the future," he said, referring to Dunedin and Invercargill's airports as well as Wanaka and Queenstown.

Wanaka Airport specifically has been operating as an airfield for 40 years and is already a thriving regional airport with more than 50,000 aircraft movements each year. Last year, Sounds Air introduced scheduled domestic services at Wanaka Airport."

Queenstown Lakes District Council mayor Jim Boulton's reaction to Michael's comments was less tactful.

"That's not for them to decide," he told Tourism Ticker.

"I think the more salient point is Tarras airport is a pipe dream – it'll never happen, so I've given up even thinking about it."

Jim added there would never be a financial justification for the Tarras airport; CIAL would never get the consents required; and "it would be an environmental crime".

Wanaka Stakeholder Group (WSG) chair Michael Ross told the Wanaka App the group was not surprised by Michael Singleton's statement.

"However they are clearly missing the irony that they are planning to build a brand new jet [capable] airport only 55km from an existing jet airport in Queenstown. In airport terms, especially in a country with our population, that is also close proximity, and madness," he said.

Michael Singleton also told Tourism Ticker it was unclear what QAC's long term plan was for Wanaka Airport, and that CIAL was engaged in a "competition of ideas here".

Colin Keel told the Wanaka App that QAC will soon be in a position to resume its long-term planning, after the preparation of draft master plans for Wanaka Airport was halted in 2019 to await an independent socio-economic impact assessment (which was completed in mid-2020), and the Queenstown Lakes district spatial plan (which was recently released for

community consultation).

“We are looking forward to creating a shared vision for the future of both Wanaka and Queenstown airports, in step with the communities and businesses in the Southern Lakes region as well as the operators at the two airports,” Colin said.

“Consulting with QLDC and the community will be key as we consider the role that air travel plays in supporting the region, and the scale and nature of any future airport developments. We expect to share and consult widely on draft master plans next year.”