

Drone Use on Public Conservation Land

All aircraft operating on Public Conservation Land (‘PCL’) outside of a certified aerodrome require a concession (i.e., an ‘authorisation’) to take off, land, or hover. Drones are aircraft, and therefore require a concession to operate on PCL. The Department of Conservation (‘DOC’) is responsible for granting drone concessions.

Summary Statement

Drone applications can be placed into 1 of the 3 following categories:

- **Green Category** – The application meets the statutory tests, and a drone concession should be granted unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- **Orange Category** – It is unclear if the application meets the statutory tests, and a case-by-case assessment of the drone application is required.
- **Red Category** – The application does not meet the statutory tests, and a drone concession should be declined unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Legal / Statutory Basis

A concession can only be granted if the concession activity is consistent with the Part 3B of the Conservation Act 1987 (‘Part 3B’). When assessing concession applications DOC must consider:

- The statutory purpose of the Act.
- The statutory purpose for which the conservation land is held.
- The relevant statutory planning documents.¹
- Any adverse effects of the activity, and whether there are reasonable methods to avoid, remedy, or mitigate these adverse effects.

DOC must also give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

DOC has undertaken analysis of where drones can operate on PCL (and for what purposes) in accordance with the relevant statutory tests of Part 3B. This has resulted in DOC’s Drone Use Policy. DOC has applied this policy to PCL locations and whether drone use is appropriate at these locations.

Relevant regulatory processes

Anyone seeking a concession must submit a concession application to DOC. DOC’s Permissions Team is responsible for accepting and processing concession applications.

Concession applicants should refer to [Drone use on conservation land: Apply for permits](#). This will help applicants identify how PCL locations for drone use have been categorised. It also provides information on the application process.

Relation to DOC outcomes

DOC’s work is guided by our strategy, which outlines [our purpose and outcomes](#).

This position is aligned with the DOC outcomes of ‘Improved performance of the conservation regulatory system’.

Review

This position statement will be reviewed within 1-year of implementation.

¹ Statutory Planning Documents include the Conservation General Policy (CGP), Conservation Management Strategy (CMS), Conservation Management Plan (CMP), General Policy for National Parks (GPNP), and National Park Management Plans.