



Aviation Industry Cluster Takes Off

contributed by Shaun Mitchell

In September, during the celebrations at Hamilton International Airport to mark the 1000th aircraft manufactured in the Waikato region, Shaun Mitchell, GM of the Waikato Aviation Cluster announced that they were to become the Aviation Industry Cluster, expanding their scope toward the national interest. KiwiFlyer invited Shaun to use this page to help spread their new message.

On 16 September, the Aviation Industry Cluster was launched during an historic celebration at Hamilton International Airport to mark the 1000th aircraft to be manufactured in the Waikato region.

Operating on a regional basis since 2007, the Waikato Aviation Cluster was asked by some of the country's key aviation players to expand its scope from a regional emphasis to a national one.

Expanding to a national focus boosts our strength and scope, while also providing the perfect opportunity to collaborate with organisations like Aviation New Zealand and the Aviation Industry Association to achieve shared objectives.

With Aviation Industry exports totalling \$800 million in 2008 and expected to reach \$2 billion by 2020, major industry stakeholders realise the industry is too small to achieve this growth if individual companies and regional industries work in isolation. There are huge international opportunities available to us and if New Zealand really wants to make its mark on the global aviation industry, all companies across the country need to collaborate to compete.

The concept of an industry cluster is one that has been proven world-wide as an accepted tool for economic development. Clusters are formed around companies in an industry that collectively have a unique strength and which operate in geographic proximity to one another. Clusters are often formed to expand businesses, grow exports, develop skills, create jobs or even engage disadvantaged communities.

Our Aviation Industry Cluster is made up of aircraft manufacturers, pilot training organisations, aircraft maintenance specialists and a host of aviation industry suppliers. Our goal is to grow the New Zealand industry to become internationally recognised as the Australasian centre of light aircraft manufacturing, maintenance and airline pilot training. To achieve this, we are working together to accomplish three things: 1) grow our industry's capabilities and capacity; 2) nurture individual business; and 3) increase the industry's economic contribution.

"...One of the major projects we're currently working on is the establishment of a specialist aviation paint facility in Hamilton.."

So, what have we accomplished so far? At present, our members have over 16 designs and projects on the go - 15 of which are aircraft designs that have the potential to turnover \$927 million per year. Through collaboration, the Cluster has already assisted some of these projects to achieve their goals.

The Cluster has also pooled resources to build infrastructure and capability to benefit a wide range of industry players. One example of this is the Cluster providing partial funding to seal a General Aviation runway at Hamilton International Airport. This project was critical to ensure that growth of our local aircraft maintenance and airline pilot training companies is not impeded.

Another example of Cluster members pooling resources was the partial funding of a specialist heat treatment facility set up in 2009 for use by manufacturers. Setting up this facility eliminates a barrier to industry growth as aviation-grade heat treatment was previously identified as a major constraint for our members as well as an impediment to attracting new manufacturers into the Cluster.

In two years, we've achieved a lot. And, over the next few years, the Aviation Industry Cluster is set to accomplish even more. One of the major projects we're currently working on is the establishment of a specialist aviation paint facility in Hamilton. This facility is expected to become a catalyst for attracting other aviation refurbishment and manufacturing businesses to the area and growing capacity within the industry.

Additionally, we're investigating the possibility of setting up an aviation composite facility capable of handling design and prototyping. We're also looking to establish a research consortium to support industry and product development.

These are just a few of the many initiatives we're progressing, all of which are focused on adding, improving and extending capability and capacity of the New Zealand aviation industry.

At present, the Aviation Industry Cluster has 55 members from a wide range of companies operating right across the country. If you're not a part of this exciting initiative, I invite you to get on board. You can learn more about the Cluster at www.aviationcluster.co.nz or by phoning me on 07 829 7557.

Shaun Mitchell
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Aviation Industry Cluster

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