



DRONE PILOT GUIDE

A Beginner's Guide to Drone Rules in New Zealand

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SECTION 01

Start here: who this guide is for

If you fly a drone for fun in New Zealand, you are flying under Civil Aviation Rule Part 101, and you are legally responsible for every flight. There is no licence to buy and no registration to complete, but the rules still apply from the moment the props start turning.

Part 101 covers drones under 25 kg, for recreational and many commercial users alike. It is supported by an additional technical rulebook (a "Transport Instrument") called CATI 101-1. Breaching either one is an offence that can lead to fines ([CAA](#)). This guide explains the rules in plain language, shows you how to check airspace before you fly, and tells you when you need extra permission.

SECTION 02

Know the core rules

Most hobby flying is legal if you stay under 121.9 m, keep the drone in sight, fly in daylight, stay 4 km from aerodromes and get consent before flying over people or property.

Rule	What it means for you	Exceptions (all need extra steps)
Weight under 25 kg	Most consumer drones qualify. Drones of 15–25 kg must be built or inspected by an approved organisation, and the pilot must operate the drone for an approved organisation. (These can be two different approved organisations)	Over 25 kg needs Part 102 certification
Max height 121.9 m (400 ft) above ground	Measured from the ground directly below the drone, not from where you stand.	In a Danger Area specifically created for unmanned aircraft (drones and model aircraft). In Class G airspace more than 4 km from an aerodrome, with a NOTAM issued 24 hours ahead by an authorised person.
Visual line of sight	You must see the drone and the sky around it with your own eyes. Glasses are fine; binoculars are not. Stay below cloud and don't fly behind buildings or trees.	FPV goggles are allowed only with a trained observer beside you who keeps the drone in sight. You can fly beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) in an enclosed area that the drone cannot escape from if the means of entry into that space are controlled to ensure the safety of any people that might enter.

Rule	What it means for you	Exceptions (all need extra steps)
Daytime only	No flying between sunset and sunrise. (Technically, not between civil twilight and civil dawn).	Indoors, shielded, or after an approved night operations course, with orientation lights fitted
4 km from aerodromes	Applies to every aerodrome published on an aviation map, including heliports.	Either shielded with a barrier, or needs an approved pilot qualification plus ATC authorisation or the aerodrome operator's agreement (see Flying near aerodromes)
Consent over people and property	Get permission before flying above anyone, or above land, from the owner or occupier.	None for flight under Part 101
Give way to crewed aircraft	Keep clear of planes and helicopters and land immediately if one approaches.	None
One drone at a time at night	Swarm or multi-drone flying is never allowed at night under Part 101.	None

Under Part 101 you also must not fly in restricted airspace or military operating areas without permission, fly in low-flying zones, or carry out aerial spraying or topdressing ([CAA](#)).

SECTION 03

Fly safely

The law puts the safety of people, property and other aircraft on you: you must take all practicable steps to minimise hazards, and keep your drone safe to fly and well maintained ([CAA](#)).

People and property. Don't fly directly over people unless they say it's OK. Even then, flying a heavier drone over people can have significant risk of injury if something goes wrong.

Don't fly over property unless you have permission. Property means more than houses: it includes farms, land, private lakes, boats and vehicles. For public land such as parks, reserves, some beaches and national parks, the consent comes from the local council or the Department of Conservation ([CAA](#)). Even with consent, keep a safe and considerate distance from people and buildings.

Your aircraft. Check that batteries are fully charged and propellers, arms and the camera mount are secure and undamaged before every flight. Keep firmware and your flight app updated, and set a return-to-home height that clears local trees and powerlines.

Hazards on site. Clear the area of people and animals, and look for powerlines, aerals and trees. Wind, rain and cold shorten battery life and push drones off course, so check the forecast and stay within your drone's wind limit.

Other aircraft. Low-flying helicopters, topdressing aircraft, and spray aircraft work well below 120 m in rural New Zealand. Watch and listen the whole time, and land straight away if you see or hear one nearby.

If something goes wrong. Land as soon as it's safe. If your drone hits a person, property or another aircraft, or has a near miss with one, report it to CAA using the unmanned aircraft occurrence form (CA005UA).

SECTION 04

Check the airspace before every flight

Check the airspace before every flight, even at a spot you've flown before. Your first stop is always **HAAST**, a free low-level airspace and hazard map for New Zealand, administered by the Royal New Zealand Air Force. It shows airspace, NOTAMs, reported obstacles such as wires and masts, and other low-level operations, including military flying. You can also file your own flight intention so other pilots know where you'll be. Registration is free (**HAAST**).

- **Outside the dark blue boundary of a control zone:** HAAS is your best source of airspace information.
- Inside controlled airspace, unshielded flights require ATC clearance through **AirShare**. A shielded flight is conducted within 100m of and below the top of a natural or man-made object. Within a control zone you are permitted to fly up to 10m above the shield.

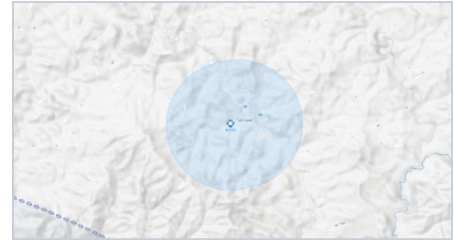
Airspace	Can a hobbyist fly there?
Low flying zone	Never
Restricted area	Only with permission from the authority that manages it (often wildlife areas)
Military operating area	Only with permission from the military; many are switched on by NOTAM.
Control zone (controlled airspace)	Only with ATC clearance through AirShare's My Flights, unless shielded or up to 10m above the shield.
Danger area	Flying is permitted, but you must check the area's status, understand any hazards or activities taking place, and ensure it is safe to fly before entering. Follow any applicable restrictions or instructions.
Within 4 km of an aerodrome	Only with an approved pilot qualification and the permissions below.

Check for all of these on HAAS before you fly. Rules source: [CAA, Check the airspace before you fly](#).

SECTION 05

Flying within 4 km of an aerodrome

When you are flying within 4km of an aerodrome additional requirements and restrictions may apply. Both HAAST and AirShare show the area within 4km of an aerodrome as a blue shaded area.



The easiest way to fly in the blue shaded areas is to fly shielded with a barrier. A shielded operation is conducted within 100 m horizontally of a natural or man-made object and no more than 10 m above its top. You must also have a barrier that will physically stop the flight of your drone towards an aerodrome that is within 4km of the operation. If you are relying on flying shielded with a barrier then you must not fly above the barrier.

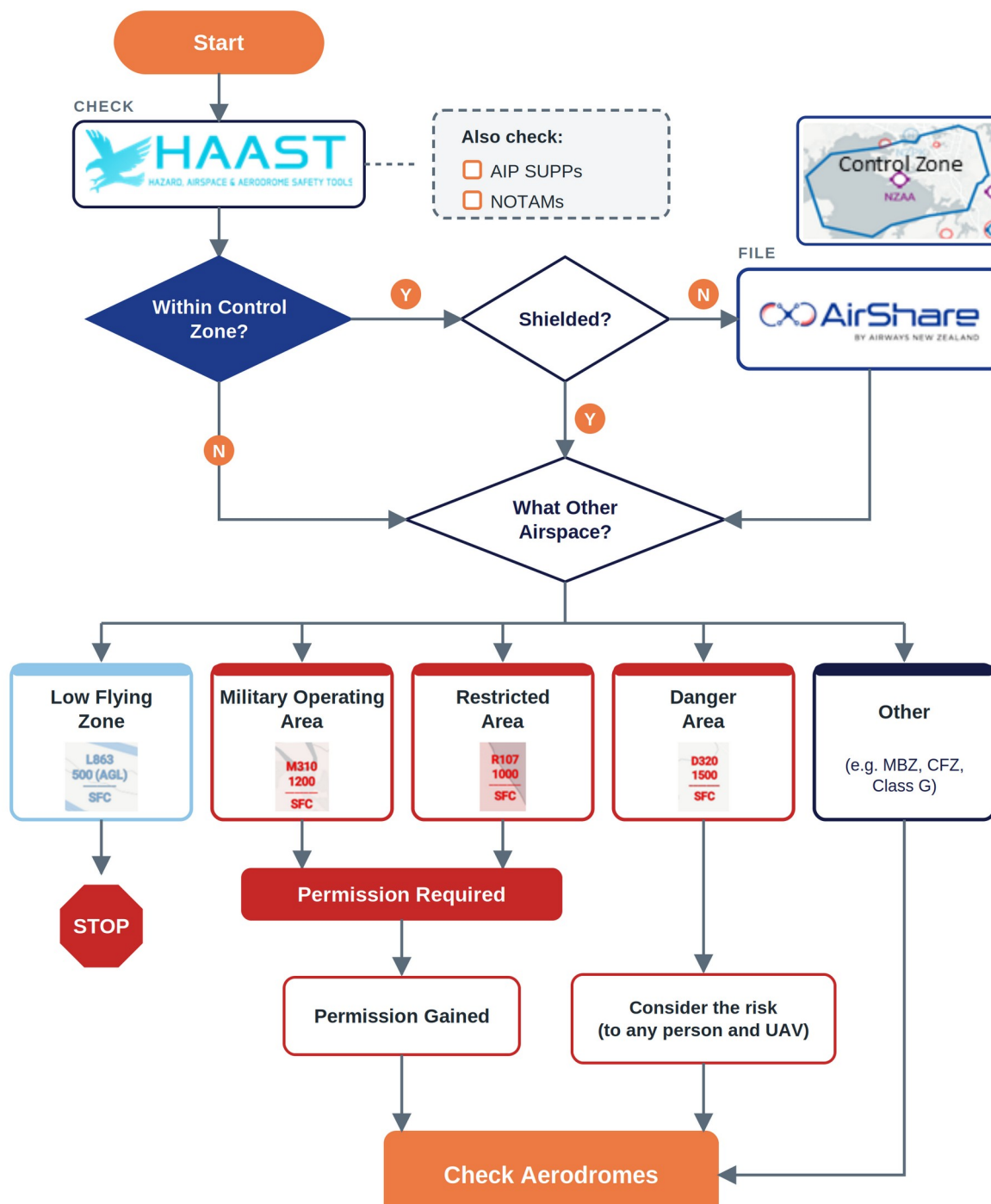
If you can't fly shielded with a barrier then you must comply with additional requirements. You must hold an approved pilot qualification (or be under the direct supervision of a person who holds one) and have the relevant permissions:

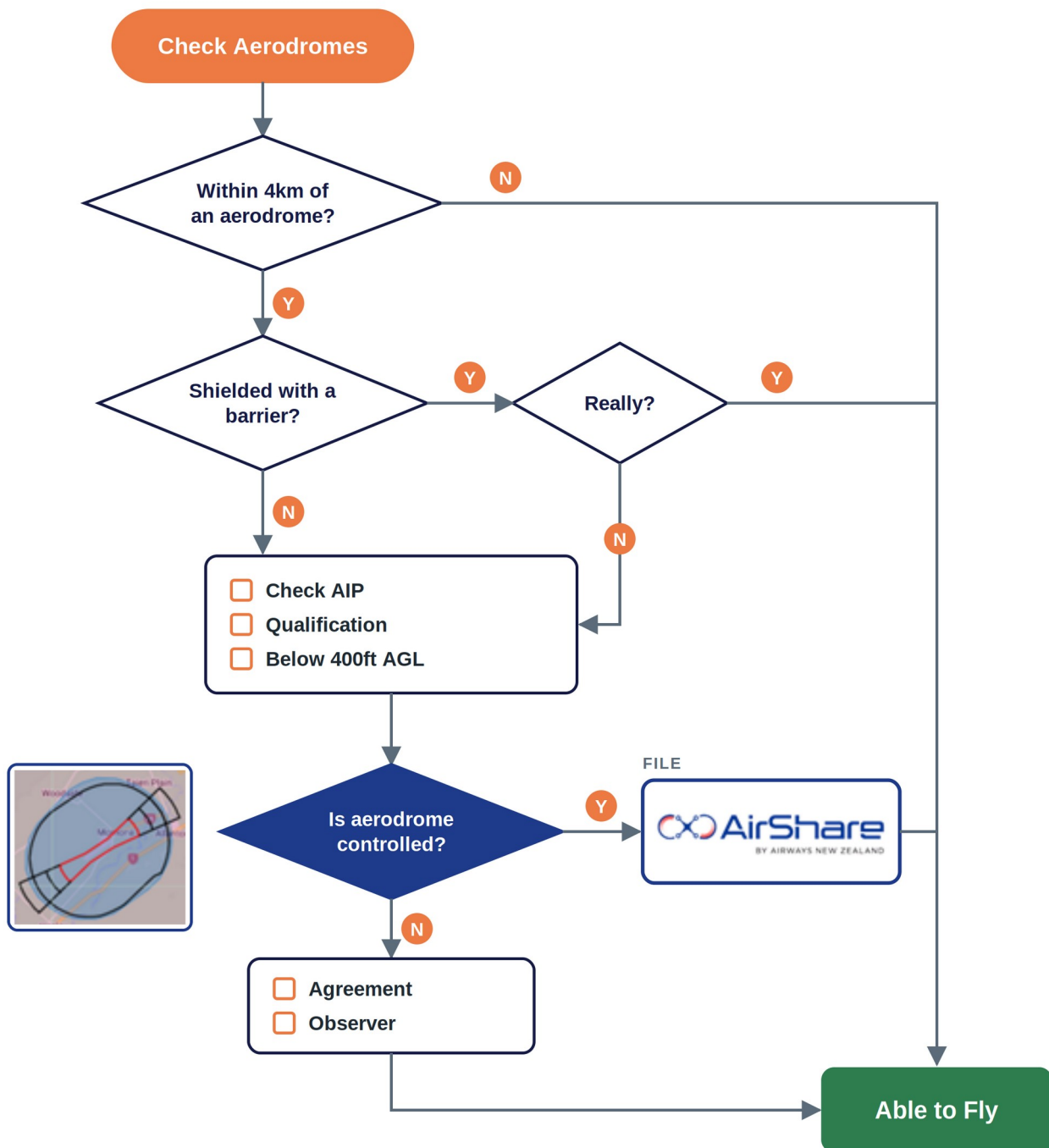
- **Major airports inside a control zone:** get ATC approval through AirShare's My Flights.
- **Uncontrolled Aerodromes in uncontrolled airspace:** get the aerodrome operator's agreement, have an **observer** with you watching for aircraft, and stay at or below 121.9 m.
- **Uncontrolled Aerodromes inside a control zone:** you will need to fly shielded or have ATC approval to fly in the airspace, and you will also need to meet the requirements in the previous bullet for flying within 4km of an uncontrolled aerodrome.
- **Overlapping 4 km circles** (an airstrip and a hospital helipad, for example): get every permission for every aerodrome you're within 4 km of.

SECTION 06

Plan your flight: step-by-step flowcharts

Use the following flow chart as a planning aid alongside current CAA rules and HAAST information.





Source: Fenix UAS.

SECTION 07

Get the right permissions

Many hobbyists will never need a certificate. What you will need is permission for specific places, and possibly a pilot qualification to unlock the most common extras.

You want to...	What you need
Fly over someone's land or above people	Their consent (owner or occupier for land; council or DOC for public land)
Fly in a control zone	ATC clearance through AirShare, or fly shielded
Fly within 4 km of an aerodrome	An approved pilot qualification, plus ATC clearance or the aerodrome operator's agreement and an observer
Fly at night	An approved night operations course, orientation lights, and a 30-minute shielded refresher if you haven't flown at night in 90 days
Fly a drone of 15–25 kg	The aircraft is built or inspected by an approved organisation. The pilot flies the aircraft for an approved organisation.
Fly beyond line of sight, over people without consent, a drone over 25 kg, or spray.	A Part 102 operator certificate

Sources: [CATI 101-1](#), [CAA Part 102](#).

Pilot qualifications. A pilot qualification from a CAA Part 141 training organisation such as Fenix UAS is what lets you fly within 4 km of aerodromes, and the additional night rating course allows flight at night under Part 101 (see Getting trained). A qualification from a Part 141 training organisation is not a Part 102 certificate ([CAA](#)).

Part 102 certification.

Where the proposed operation cannot meet Part 101 or its permitted exceptions, the operator will require CAA Part 102 certification. Application to CAA for certification include an exposition describing operations procedures, risks and controls, training, and aircraft maintenance. A pilot qualification is not the same as an operator certificate.

SECTION 08

Check other rules: landowners, councils, DOC and privacy

CAA rules are only part of the picture: landowners, councils, DOC and privacy law can all limit where and how you fly.

Conservation land (DOC). You need a DOC permit if your drone will take off, land or fly over on Department of Conservation administered land, even for fun. DOC sorts land into green, orange and red zones on its online map. A green-zone recreational permit is issued online straight away and lasts a year; orange and red zones need a separate application ([DOC](#)). Orange zone permits have a very expensive application fee and might not even be granted. Red zone permits have the same application fee as a green zone permit, but will almost certainly be declined.

Carry your permit, paper or on your phone, whenever you fly. No further recreational permits are being issued for Fiordland National Park ([DOC](#)).

Council parks and reserves. Councils give the consent for flying over the land they manage, and many have their own drone policy or bylaw. Check your council's website before flying in a local park, beach reserve or sports ground.

Privacy. The Privacy Act 2020 applies to footage and photos you take of identifiable people. Don't film people in private spaces such as backyards without their agreement, don't share footage that could embarrass or identify someone, and delete what you don't need.

Wildlife and farm animals. Drones can panic stock and disturb nesting birds and marine mammals. Keep well away, and land if animals react.

SECTION 09

Before every flight: pre-flight checklist

Run through this every time you fly.

- ☐ Checked HAAST for control zones, aerodromes within 4 km, restricted and military areas, and low flying zones
- ☐ Have ATC clearance through AirShare if flying unshielded in controlled airspace.
- ☐ Have aerodrome operator agreement if needed
- ☐ Have consent from people and landowners I'll fly over (council or DOC for public land)
- ☐ Carrying a DOC permit if I'm on conservation land
- ☐ Checked the weather: wind within limits, no rain, cloud well above 120 m, daylight for the whole flight
- ☐ Batteries charged; props, arms and camera secure and undamaged
- ☐ Return-to-home height set above trees and powerlines
- ☐ Area is clear of people, animals and obstacles
- ☐ Observer with me if I'm using FPV goggles or flying near an uncontrolled aerodrome
- ☐ Ready to land straight away if a crewed aircraft appears

SECTION 10

Get trained with Fenix UAS



A Part 101 course is the quickest way to fly with confidence, and an approved pilot qualification is what lets you fly within 4 km of an aerodrome or at night.

CAA Part 141 certificated

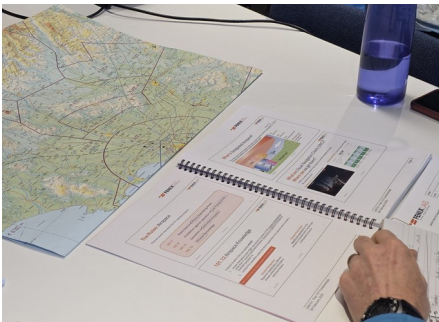
Nationally recognised drone training (TR86491).

Nationwide

Courses and flight tests delivered across New Zealand.

Aviation expertise

A team with commercial aviation, military and regulatory backgrounds.



Fenix UAS is a CAA Part 141 certificated training organisation (TR86491), delivering courses and flight tests nationwide ([Fenix UAS](#)). Its **UAS Remote Pilot Certificate** is built for people who only want to fly under Part 101. Over two days you complete the 101 Ground Course, covering airspace, flying within 4 km of an aerodrome, night and line-of-sight rules, NOTAMs, accident reporting and hazard management, then a flight test ([Fenix UAS courses](#)).

Prefer to start at home? Fenix's Online 101 Fundamentals course is self-paced and can be used as preparation or a refresher. The online course alone does not provide the practical flight-test qualification for unshielded flights within 4 km of an aerodrome. Contact Fenix to confirm the current flight-test completion timeframe and available examiner locations.



When you're ready to go further, Fenix UAS also runs night ratings, the Advanced UAS Remote Pilot Certificate for Part 102 work, and helps operators prepare their Part 102 exposition. Contact enquiries@fenixuas.nz or +64 6 777 5288.

SECTION 11

Jargon buster: what the terms mean

Term	What it means
AGL	Above ground level. Height measured from the ground directly below the drone.
AIP	Aeronautical Information Publication. The official New Zealand aviation reference, with charts and details of aerodromes and airspace. An AIP SUPP is a supplement with temporary changes.
Aerodrome	Any place used by aircraft to take off and land, from major airports to small airstrips and heliports.
ATC	Air traffic control. The controllers who manage aircraft in controlled airspace.
BVLOS	Beyond visual line of sight. Flying when you can't see the drone with your own eyes.
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand. The government agency that makes and enforces aviation rules.
CATI 101-1	The Transport Instrument that sets out the technical detail of the Part 101 rules.
CFZ	Common frequency zone. An area where pilots use a shared radio frequency to talk to each other.
Class G airspace	Uncontrolled airspace. Most airspace outside control zones.
Control zone	Controlled airspace around a major airport, where ATC manages air traffic.
Danger area	Airspace where activities that could be hazardous to aircraft may take place, such as firearms or demolition.
FPV	First person view. Flying by watching a live video feed from the drone, usually through goggles.
Low flying zone	An area where crewed aircraft practise flying low. Drones must never fly there.
MBZ	Mandatory broadcast zone. An area where pilots must make radio calls to say where they are.
Military operating area	Airspace used by the Defence Force. You need their permission to fly there.
NOTAM	Notice to Airmen. An official notice about a temporary hazard or change, such as an airspace closure.
Observer	A person who stands with the pilot and helps watch the drone and the sky for other aircraft.
Part 101	The CAA rules most hobby and many commercial drone pilots fly under.
Part 102	CAA certification for operators who need to fly outside the Part 101 rules.
Part 141	CAA certification for approved training organisations, such as Fenix UAS.
Restricted area	Airspace you can only enter with permission from the authority that manages it.
Shielded operation	Flying close to and below the top of a natural or man-made object, such as a building or row of trees, which shields the drone from other aircraft.

SECTION 12

Sources and more information

- **HAAST**: main source for airspace, hazards and low-level activity
- [CAA: Intro to Part 101 rules for unmanned aircraft](#)
- [CAA: CATI 101-1 transport instrument \(in force 22 December 2025\)](#)
- [CAA: Flying your drone safely](#)
- [CAA: Check the airspace before you fly](#)
- [CAA: Intro to Part 102 certification](#)
- [DOC: Recreational drone use](#)
- AirShare: ATC clearances
- [Fenix UAS: Training](#)
- [Fenix UAS: UAS courses](#)

SECTION 13

Get in touch



Ready to fly with confidence?

Have a question about the rules, or ready to book a course or flight test? Talk to the Fenix UAS team. We deliver training and flight tests nationwide.

Fenix UAS

Email	enquiries@fenixuas.nz
Phone	+64 6 777 5288
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Facebook	facebook.com/FenixUAS



Drone courses and flight tests, nationwide

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