

Hard look at need for third Nest helicopter

RECENTLY your paper questioned the need and cost of a third helicopter and David Keys, a Nest (Northland Emergency Services Trust) trustee and finance committee member, accuses you of letting the facts get in the way of a good story.

Here are some facts which appear to have been in the way of the stories spun to buy yet another Sikorsky helicopter:

Story
Extra backup for the second "backup" Sikorsky (already in the Nest fleet) is needed because of increasing downtime required for CAA inspection and maintenance, which is around five weeks every 300 hours.

Fact
Because NEST own the only

Sikorsky machines in New Zealand, the registered service agent Hawker Pacific retains a tiny staff (with the only fully accredited Sikorsky engineer in New Zealand).

As a consequence, the time taken for maintenance for Nest machines is about double the time taken for popular machines used by Auckland's Westpac Rescue Trust and others.

Sikorskys require more frequent maintenance checks than comparable machines.

Story
A second and now third helicopter is required for "backup" while the other one is being serviced.

Fact
"Loan" machines are provided



Mike Daniel

Story
A compelling reason for the latest purchase (which by the way is more than 30 years old) is that it has a winch, which the second "reserve" helicopter doesn't have.

Fact
Winches can be purchased

to users of all popular machines during maintenance periods.

Hawker Pacific are unable to offer a loan machine as NEST is their only Sikorsky customer.

separately. There is no more reason to buy a helicopter with a winch in order to secure a winch than there is to purchase an additional car with a towbar to secure a tow bar for a car without.

Story
Nest gives "the best possible coverage to Northland".

Fact
Nest's Sikorskys cost about \$1486 per hour to run.

Auckland's Westpac rescue helicopters (BK 117s) cost about \$1033 per hour to run. This represents an unnecessary extra cost of \$465 per hour or an additional cost to Nest of \$465000 per year (Mr Bain has stated flying hours will approach 1000 this year).

Source: The Helivalues Bluebook, an accepted industry

standard survey of comparative running costs.

Story
The only logical remaining argument to support Nest's ongoing faith in Sikorskys is capital cost.

Fact
The price paid for any of the fleet is top secret and not available to the public.

But given the huge difference in running costs Mr Bain will have to have purchased the aircraft at world-beating prices.

So while there is no doubt Nest is providing a second-to-none rescue service to Northland it comes at a price which Northlanders shouldn't be paying.

As guardians of the service, which is largely funded by

Northlanders I suggest trustees should question the logic of continuing with the present means of delivering this outstanding service. I'm sure the chairman has a reason for his unerring faith in Sikorskys. I wish he would share it with Northlanders—the people who pay him.

■ Mike Daniel is a director and shareholder in Airwork NZ Ltd www.airwork.co.nz

Tell us what you think

Email or text