

# ATC Assistance Crossing Cook Strait

Cook Strait is the only area in the country where a radar information service is routinely provided to VFR flights in uncontrolled airspace, and for good reason.

With 14 miles at its narrowest point, a Cook Strait crossing can seem daunting. To provide some peace of mind, many would-be crossers contact Wellington Approach requesting a climb into controlled airspace, or a radar information service in Class G (uncontrolled) airspace.

The Wellington Approach team (122.3 MHz) tries to accommodate transponder-equipped VFR flights crossing the Strait, and when possible, clears VFR flights to climb into controlled airspace. Due to IFR flights operating into and out of Wellington, Woodbourne, and Paraparaumu, that isn't always possible.

If ATC workload allows, a radar information service in uncontrolled airspace may be provided as an alternative, for aircraft with a transponder.

As mentioned above, Cook Strait is the only area of the country where this service is offered to VFR flights outside controlled airspace. That's due to the low controlled airspace base (2500 feet) and distance being flown over water.

## ATC Radar Services

To help clarify the differences in ATC radar services, a radar *control* service provides separation for IFR aircraft in Class C airspace, and a radar *information* service does not separate aircraft. A radar information service can, however, provide traffic avoidance advice to aircraft where necessary.

These radar services are primarily established for IFR air transport operations in controlled airspace.

When ATC tells an aircraft that it's been "identified", that notifies the pilot that a radar service is being provided. Should an emergency situation arise, being identified at a known location will help Air Traffic Services to provide assistance.

A radar information service may provide traffic information, including:

- » a clock reference bearing relative to the traffic position
- » range of the traffic
- » direction the traffic appears to be proceeding in
- » level of the traffic mode C readout (if the controller adds "unverified", this means the information may be incorrect due to the other flight not being in communication with the controller)

- » other useful information such as "helicopter", should the traffic be squawking code 1500 (VFR helicopter); or relative speed (fast/slow)
- » advice when the traffic is clear.

When traffic details (including flight plan and call sign) are not known by ATC, the controller may advise "unknown traffic", followed by the information that is available.

Should navigational assistance be provided, a radar service may:

- » confirm that a track is clear of other airspace
- » confirm correct traffic track to location/position
- » provide distance to/from location
- » provide track to/from location
- » provide navigational information as required.



VFR advisory routes on Visual Navigation Chart C7.

## Your Responsibilities

Radar might not detect all uncontrolled flight, but wherever possible, controllers will attempt to pass timely traffic information to identified aircraft. Don't let this lull you into a false sense of security.

As the pilot, you are still responsible for your separation and adherence to weather minima in uncontrolled airspace. The onus is on you to stay alert and continue communicating, navigating, maintaining a good lookout, and remaining in visual meteorological conditions. The basic principle of 'see and avoid' still applies.

Other flights operating in uncontrolled airspace (IFR or VFR) that aren't receiving a radar information service are unlikely to be on Wellington Approach frequency. So it's recommended you contact Christchurch Information on the FISCOM frequency (121.3 MHz), monitoring other frequencies as might be appropriate.

Importantly, a radar controller providing either radar service will require you to listen out and maintain communications on their frequency until you advise that the service is no longer required, or the controller advises that the radar service is terminated. In this case, Wellington Approach will use the phrase "radar service terminated". That will usually occur once you've crossed the Strait.

If Wellington Approach has issued you a squawk code, after service termination revert back to your normal code, or 1200 (if VFR fixed wing), while making sure you are at a correct cruising level for VFR flight.

## More Information

For greater detail see *AIP New Zealand* ENR 1.6-5 ATS Surveillance Services. ■