

# Queenstown Airport 20 May 2017 curfew investigation

## Summary of findings:

- On 20 May 2017 Queenstown Airport operations were affected early in the day by snow and ice. Flight JQ223 was scheduled to arrive at 19:45 but was 30 minutes late due to the aircraft requiring de-icing in Queenstown earlier in the day.
- The corresponding outbound flight JQ220 to Melbourne was scheduled to depart at 20:45. However, during the aircraft turnaround the crew observed ice on top of the wings due to near zero temperature conditions. The flight was boarded (99 passengers) then delayed while a two-stage de-icing procedure was completed before being cleared for takeoff.
- The crew assessed that they would be able to achieve pushback at 21:35 and be airborne at 21:45. They advised the Control Tower of their expected pushback time and re-confirmed with the Tower that curfew was 22:00.
- The aircraft pushed back at 21:47 and taxied to the 23 (Kawarau Gorge) end of the runway.
- At 21:47, with the aircraft pushing back, and with 13 minutes for the flight to depart, QAC Operations believed that there was enough time based on the average 9 minutes it takes from pushback to wheels up taking off from the 23 end of the runway.
- However, the pushback was very slow. At 21:54 the pilot contacted the Control Tower and asked for clarification on whether the aircraft needed to be in the air by 22:00 or just receive clearance to take off before 22:00.
- The Controller consulted their direct manager and the QAC Operations team to seek clarification or if there were any specific procedures to be applied to flights running up against or potentially exceeding 22:00. Jetstar also contacted its Melbourne-based operations team for confirmation regarding the curfew requirements.
- Once the pushback was complete, there was a problem removing the tow-bar which took approximately 4 minutes. Once the ground handler disconnected the tow bar from the aircraft and received clearance, it was 21:57.
- QAC Operations ultimately gave authorisation for the late departure to the Control Tower. This was based on the rationale of concern for the 99 passengers who had already been onboard for 90 minutes. They did not want to put them through a deplaning process for what they thought would be a departure only a couple of minutes past 22:00.
- However, once the aircraft had lined up on Runway 23, the crew advised the Control Tower that due to curfew they would return to the gate. The Control Tower then advised them that they had received permission from QAC Operations to depart after curfew. The pilot asked if there were any Civil Aviation Authority or Air Traffic Control restrictions and the controller advised that there were none.
- Jetstar then contacted its operations team in Melbourne to confirm approval to depart and to conduct a final wing inspection for icing. This further delayed the departure of the flight.
- The flight's departure time was 22:13, which exceeded QAC's curfew by 13 minutes.

## Summary of corrective actions:

- QAC has written to all airlines and Air Traffic Control, reconfirming QAC curfew requirements.
- Additional wording will be included in Queenstown Airport's Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) and Aerodrome Operation Manual and the airlines' pilot training materials and Route Manuals for absolute clarification that aircraft must be either 'wheels up' (departure) or 'wheels on the ground' (arrivals) 22:00, without exception.
- All key operations staff including QAC, Air Traffic Control and the four airlines serving Queenstown Airport will receive further communications on these procedures to ensure complete understanding of the Council resource consent requirements.
- In the future, QAC will stand an aircraft down if it considers that it will breach the curfew.

# Sequence of Events



**20.15** JQ223 ex Sydney arrives in Queenstown 30 minutes behind schedule.

**20.45** Scheduled departure time for JQ220 to Melbourne – 99 passengers on board.

**21.15- 21.40** De-icing procedures required for takeoff clearance.

**21.35** New estimated departure time.

**21.47** JQ220 pushes back from terminal.

**21.54** Pilot contacts control tower to clarify curfew. Question relates to whether aircraft must be in the air or simply cleared at 22.00 to take off.

**21.57** Aircraft fully decoupled after difficulties disconnecting towing bar.

**21.57** Cleared by QAC Terminal Duty Manager for takeoff based on concern for passengers who had been onboard for over an hour.

**22.00** Crew advises Tower it would return to gate due to curfew. Tower advises permission to depart had been granted. Pilot enquires about CAA or Air Traffic Control restrictions and is advised there are none. Jetstar contacts Melbourne operations to confirm approval to depart. Conducts final wing inspection for ice, delaying takeoff.



**22.12** JQ220 departs - wheels up 13 minutes past curfew.



20:15

20:30

20:45

21:00

21:15

21:30

21:45

22:00

22:15

22:30

Time (24Hr)