

## **STATEMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AVIATION**

### **In regards to the Cessna 172R, Registration DQ-FTR accident near Mt Delaikoro, Vanua Levu on 26 February 2018:**

The Cessna 172R aircraft, registered as DQ-FTR and operated by the Pacific Flying School, crashed shortly after midday on 26 February 2018 in mountainous terrain, 6.6 nautical miles South of Labasa near Mt Delaikoro at a height of 2,600 feet. The aircraft's two occupants were fatally injured in the accident.

An independent forensic engineer and air accident investigator, Mr Andrew McGregor of New Zealand-based Prosolve Ltd, was appointed by the Minister of Civil Aviation to investigate the accident.

The investigator's report stated that on the morning of 26 February 2018, three occupants (a flying instructor, a student pilot and a friend of the student pilot) departed from their base at Nadi and flew on a cross-country training flight to Labasa. After waiting for approximately three hours for the weather to improve, two of the occupants (the flying instructor and student pilot) departed for Savusavu at 11:37 am, while one occupant (friend of the student pilot) remained behind at Labasa.

At the time of the aircraft's departure from Labasa airport, it was likely that visibility and cloud coverage complied with Visual Flight Rules, in accordance with Fiji's Air Navigation Regulations and the cross-country training flight plan. However, soon after departing Labasa, weather conditions and visibility across the mountains quickly deteriorated, thereby entrapping the aircraft without an escape route and causing it to impact steep mountainous terrain.

The flying instructor, who was pilot in command, had a total of 1,257 hours of flying experience at the time of the accident.

The accident investigation report issued several recommendations, including the requirement for general aviation pilots to undergo mountain flying training, and the development of a new training and information module on Fiji's climatology. The latter would focus on Fiji's unique weather patterns, including the risks and unpredictable nature of tropical low-pressure trough weather systems, and facilitate improvements in weather briefing services for pilots. The Department of

Civil Aviation will work closely on the implementation of these recommendations to ensure that Fijian pilots are better prepared for risks involved in mountain flying and unpredictable changes in weather.

The full accident report is available on the Department of Civil Aviation's website, <http://www.civilaviation.gov.fj/>.