

SKYPORTS DRONE SERVICES PARTNERS WITH EQUINOR FOR CARGO DRONE DELIVERIES TO OFFSHORE OIL FIELD

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Skyports Drone Services and Norwegian energy firm Equinor partnered to trial electric drone deliveries to oil installations in the North Sea. The project aims to demonstrate how on-demand cargo drone services can solve logistical challenges and improve safety and sustainability in the offshore environment. The two-month flight programme, launched in early September, marks the first time that daily, on-demand drone services offshore have been piloted from shore. The highly automated cargo drone, from Swoop Aero, flies distances of up to 114km, operating cargo deliveries between Equinor's processing centre site in Mongstad on the west coast of Norway and three installations in the Gullfaks oil field in the North Sea, as well as intra-installation. The North Sea operations with Equinor are Skyports Drone Services longest flights to date.

Skyports Drone Services has already operated dozens of flights for the project and is scheduled to operate hundreds more throughout the trial, carrying a range of cargo, including spare parts, equipment and care packages. Uncrewed drone services are substantially cheaper, faster to mobilise, and safer than conventional transportation methods and can fly in much lower visibility, including thick fog, which Equinor and Skyports Drone Services hope to enable, regulation permitting, in the future. The service is also profoundly more sustainable than internal combustion engine transportation, with the electric drones producing zero operating emissions.

For Skyports Drone Services and Equinor alike, a key focus of the trial is to explore how the service can be scaled with minimal human intervention. The aircraft are remotely piloted by a small Skyports Drone Services team from the newly opened Equinor ROC in Bergen. The aircraft fly automatically with Skyports Drone Services experienced remote pilots overseeing the duration of the operations. Equinor staff located on the installations have been trained by Skyports Drone Services to load and unload cargo, switch and charge batteries, and safely interact with the drones, and have completed installation side activities for all flights conducted to date.

Early project results have been positive and highlight the ease with which deliveries could be extended to include additional installations.

Alex Brown, Director of Skyports Drone Services, commented: “This project with Equinor proves that drone delivery can offer a safer, cost-effective, more sustainable alternative to conventional transport methods in offshore environments. The offshore energy sector is perfectly placed to benefit from drone deliveries due to the inherent time sensitive nature of working offshore, as well as the extreme remoteness and ruggedness of operations. We are currently exploring how we can expand this groundbreaking work into adjacent sectors such as offshore wind and ship resupply”.

Skyports Drone Services has worked with Avinor and the Civil Aviation Authority of Norway to secure flight permissions. During the trial period, Skyports Drone Services has opted to employ the Swoop Aero Kite aircraft. The fixed-wing drone is the latest solution by Australian logistics platform company, and long-time partner of Skyports Drone Services, Swoop Aero. The fully electric aircraft has a 5kg payload capacity, range of up to 175km, and can operate in harsh weather conditions, including wind and rain.

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