

# Don Driver's 50-year-old Kingsford Smith sculpture may not have a place in upgraded NP airport

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ARCHIVE

Joyce Driver said she would certainly be disappointed if her husband's mural didn't stay at the airport.

A future of a mural that has been a permanent fixture at New Plymouth airport for 50 years is uncertain.

The aluminum relief sculpture, created by nationally renowned New Plymouth artist Don Driver, who died in 2011, hangs above the check-in area at New Plymouth airport.

It commemorates the arrival at the airport in 1933 of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith from Australia in the Southern Cross monoplane in what was the first-ever passenger-carrying crossing of the Tasman Sea.

But the future of the historic relief is in doubt as it is not yet known whether there will be a place for it after the airport's \$28 million upgrade.

Don's wife Joyce Driver said she hoped the mural would stay at the airport as she believed it had a special cultural significance.

"I'd certainly be disappointed if the mural didn't stay at the airport. A little bit of heritage would be lost," she said.

"It was part of the original terminal building and it was important to celebrate the first ever Trans-Tasman passenger flight."

Already a world famous flyer when he landed, Kingsford Smith's 14 hours flight from Australia to touch down at the Bell Block aerodrome created a special connection with Taranaki.

The 7 metre by 2 metre piece was commissioned by the New Plymouth City Council (NPCC) in 1966 for the newly-opened air terminal and installed in January 1967.

Driver said her husband spent a few months creating the mural during the summer in 1966.

"He actually built an aluminium model plane to replicate the larger history-making plane as part of the design, which is included in the mural as it comes in over the sea."

Airport manager Wayne Wootton said the New Plymouth District Council was currently developing a detailed design of the new terminal building, including a significant cultural art strategy.

"The mural is being considered as part of that strategy," he said.

"We can't confirm yet if it will remain in the terminal but whether it is or not, it will be retained by the council."

**- Stuff**