

Toulouse, 1st September 2026

**Kepplair Evolution reaches a symbolic milestone
with the first pre-modification flight of its prototype aircraft,
marking the start of the KEPPLAIR 72 flight test programme**



Having arrived in Toulouse in early August, the first Kepplair Evolution ATR 72 prototype has just completed its first pre-modification flight, a key milestone that officially launches the test campaign for the KEPPLAIR 72, the future multi-role water bomber dedicated to civil protection.

Piloted by **Eric Delesalle**, the programme's flight test director, a former chief pilot and test pilot at ATR, and **Axel Valat**, a test pilot at Aerotec & Concept, the aircraft – now bearing Kepplair Evolution's livery – is thus commencing its flight test programme, with a view to certification in 2027. It completed two flights over Toulouse before being grounded until the end of the year whilst it is converted into a water bomber.

The aircraft will be fitted with the KEDS (Kepplair Evolution Delivery System) drop system, specially developed by Kepplair Evolution in collaboration with the Toulouse Institute of Fluid Mechanics (IMFT), Professor Dominique Legendre and Trotter Controls, the international benchmark in the design and manufacture of telemetry systems and drop doors for water-bombing aircraft.

The conversion and certification will be carried out by Aerotec & Concept – the European leader in aircraft modifications – which is already housing the aircraft in its hangar at Toulouse-Blagnac.

Test programme, certification and technical validation

Following a phase of drop tests carried out in the laboratory at the IMFT on a full-scale test rig, drop tests will continue in flight from January 2027 as part of an operational qualification programme designed to confirm the system's performance under real-world conditions.

Following the flight test programme, the KEPPLAIR 72 is expected to obtain, by 2027, the Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) issued by EASA, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency. The certification will then be extended to other international authorities, including the FAA, the US Federal Aviation Administration. The KEPPLAIR 72 is expected to be certified and enter service in 2027, offering civil security authorities a modern, robust and rapidly industrialisable European solution.

Support from a proven ecosystem for key competitive advantages

Based on the ATR 72 platform, the KEPPLAIR 72 programme is underpinned by a rigorous scientific approach aimed at optimising the accuracy of ground tracks and, consequently, operational performance.

With the backing of several recognised industry players, the KEPPLAIR 72 project offers real competitive advantages:

- **Rapid time-to-market** (using an existing platform reduces time-to-market to 3 years, compared with 6–10 years for competitors, and limits the initial investment);
- **Technical innovation in the deployment system**, which creates a sustainable competitive advantage;
- **Cost reductions**, in terms of both development and procurement (-50 per cent), as well as operation and maintenance (-30 per cent);
- **Reduction in CO₂ emissions** of up to 40 per cent: reuse of existing aircraft, optimisation of fuel consumption, use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF)...
- **Unique versatility** of the aircraft, adaptable to customers' needs: dedicated water bomber or multi-role (water bomber, medical evacuation and cargo);
- **Experienced management**, operating in a buoyant global market and a limited competitive landscape, offering a unique and favourable strategic window of opportunity.

Fundraising and institutional support

The first two fundraising rounds have been successfully completed, raising a total of €17.5 million, including €5 million in public grants under the France 2030 programme and the ERDF, and a third round is currently underway to support the certification and industrialisation phase of the aircraft.

The KEPPLAIR 72 programme has received a letter of interest from the Directorate-General for Civil Security and Crisis Management, and has, since March 2026, benefited from the official support of the State and the Occitanie Region, under the France 2030 plan and the ERDF. It has also received official support from the National Federation of French Firefighters (FNSPF) and the French Federation of Firefighting Professions (FFMI).

This institutional and operational support confirms the relevance of a European solution designed to address the increasing frequency of forest fires and the challenges of industrial sovereignty and territorial protection.

About Kepplair Evolution:

Founded in 2012 by David Joubert, Kepplair Evolution SAS is pushing the boundaries of aeronautics to create a safer world by developing a multi-role water bomber designed for firefighting, cargo transport, and medical evacuation: the KEPPLAIR 72 "Forest Keeper".

The KEPPLAIR 72 project has received a letter of interest from the French Directorate General for Civil Security and Crisis Management, as part of the renewal of its aerial capabilities for fighting forest fires and addressing the economic sovereignty challenges facing France and Europe. In March 2026, the project also received official support from the French government and the Occitanie Region as part of the France 2030 plan and the ERDF.

Kepplair Evolution is currently in the Series A fundraising phase. This Series A round complements the successive funding rounds that have enabled the company to grow to its current stage. Initially funded by its founders, Kepplair Evolution raised €1.5 million in seed funding to launch the KEPPLAIR 72 project in 2024. From July to December 2025, the company raised an additional €5 million, including €3 million in Bonds Convertible into Shares and €2 million in a pre-Series A round. Among the investors is AVICO Group, France's leading air broker and a global leader in airline charter services. A new round of funding was completed in August 2026, for €6 million. A crowdfunding campaign, launched in May 2026, has just opened to the general public in September 2026.

More information at www.kepplair-evolution.com

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