



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Petterson MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into drone delivery systems in the ACT

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Enquiry: Drone Delivery Systems in the ACT

Committee: The Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Author:

Andrea Wild

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I am a resident of Palmerston, ACT, one of the suburbs that would be impacted by the proposed introduction of a permanent drone delivery service based in Mitchell.

Media coverage of the proposed service notes several arguments in favour of the drone delivery: drones are fun, drone delivery would create jobs and takeaway food delivery by drone is convenient for residents. I disagree.

While delivery drones may be fun for those who fly them, evidence presented by residents living in the suburb of Bonython, location of the ACT's 2018 drone delivery trial, shows that residents find the noise created by delivery drones overwhelmingly unpleasant and intrusive. This is especially so for residents close to drone flight paths.

A drone delivery service will not create jobs, it will shift them from one service provider to another, such as from a bicycle delivery rider or person serving customers at a counter, to a drone flyer. This so-called jobs creation in the ACT is a zero sum game.

While having takeaway food delivered to homes by drones may be marketed as 'convenient', what it actually delivers is easier access to unhealthy food. With more than half of the ACT population overweight or obese and heart disease – one of our biggest killers – driven largely by poor quality diets, what we need is convenient access to farmers markets, not burritos. As well as delivering an excess of fat, salt, sugar and calories, a drone delivery service may also increase social isolation in our community by reducing person to person interactions, such as those that occur opportunistically when people walk to their local supermarket, or even a takeaway. A healthy city is one that encourages walking and social interaction.

Another argument in favour of drone delivery suggests that drones may assist elderly or disabled people in the future. I note there appears to be no plan for how or when this might occur. When searching for arguments for or against drones, we do not have to look far for evidence of drones being used for much less noble purposes, such as drone strikes in Syria. I encourage the Committee to focus on the evidence of what an ACT drone delivery service would actually be used for rather than considering cherry-picked arguments that paint drone delivery in its most favourable, but least probable, light.

If drones become a commonplace and unremarkable feature of our suburbs, where could this lead? Would we lose the privacy of our backyards as cameras fly overhead? Would organised crime groups use drone-assisted spying and surveillance to plan and carry out burglaries of suburban houses?

Has the ACT Government conducted an assessment of the impact of drones on wildlife in Gungahlin, particularly birds in ecologically sensitive areas? The proposed drone delivery service area in Gungahlin borders the Ginninderra Creek corridor and includes two wetlands, Gungahlin Valley Ponds in The Valley Ave and Patrick White Pond in Franklin. All of these areas support large waterbird populations, ranging from ducks to pelicans. Other natural areas in this area of Gungahlin are also used by birds, including the Mulanggari Grasslands Nature Reserve and the North Mitchell Grasslands. Our suburban gardens and local green spaces such as along bike paths are filled with native bird species, from magpies and ravens to lorikeets and cockatoos. I refer the committee to Wallace et al 2018 (see References) for an analysis in the New Zealand context of the lack of regulation of drones with respect to impacts on wildlife.

Would drones continue to operate after dark? From early evening during October to April, our suburbs are used by fruit bats, who camp at Commonwealth Park during the day and fly out at dusk to feed on blossoming gums and fruit trees such as figs and plums in suburban gardens. Suburban

pets, such as dogs, may become distressed by the noise and sight of drones, as during fireworks but much more frequently. Drones may create wellbeing issues for pets and noise issues for neighbours due to dogs barking.

Has the ACT Government conducted a study of drone safety to people, especially children? While delivery vehicles such as bikes and cars do cause accidents, these incidents occur on roads, which is a location I can easily keep my children away from. What happens if a drone crashes due to failing or colliding with something while flying over my front yard, a playground or a green space where my children are playing? Will drones be restricted to flying only above existing roads?

I implore the ACT Government to delay the introduction of drone delivery services in the ACT pending a review of their safety to people and wildlife and their impacts on human wellbeing in suburbs. If satisfied, drone delivery services should not be permitted to operate until a mandatory regulatory framework is in place governing their operation.

Andrea Wild

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Reference

Pip Wallace, Ross Martin & Iain White (2018) Keeping pace with technology: drones, disturbance and policy deficiency, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 61:7, 1271-1288, DOI: 10.1080/09640568.2017.1353957