



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into drone delivery systems in the ACT

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Submission: INQUIRY INTO DRONE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN THE ACT

Personal Details:

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Background:

My wife and I have lived in Bonython since 2009. We moved to Bonython to enjoy the peace and quiet of a suburb and block on the very edge of the city. We particularly chose our block to access the walking tracks along the Murrumbidgee corridor, specifically throughout the Pine Island area, and appreciate the presence of the many animals and birds that frequented our immediate neighbourhood and the woodlands opposite.

I would like to comment on the following terms of reference:

- 1. The decision to base the trials of the technology in the ACT and surrounding region.**

Lack of Consultation:

We were completely unaware of the agreement between that ACT Government and Project Wing to fly delivery drones near our house until we asked a real estate agent in mid-2018 what the work was for being carried out between Pine Island Road and Rowland Rees Crescent. The agent explained it was for a trial of drones to deliver burritos and some pharmaceutical supplies to residents of Bonython. Given that our house is only some few hundred metres from the already well-developed site, we were quite surprised and concerned about these developments. We were also very upset that an agreement to allow drone deliveries over the suburb of Bonython had been reached without any due consideration, consultation or concern for the residents.

Lack of Legislation and Consideration

The agreement by the ACT Government to allow Project Wing to carry out the delivery by drone appears to have been made without any consideration of the many articles and papers that have noted the lack of appropriate legislation, due consideration and the risks inherent with drone use. Of particular interest are the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee Inquiry Report: 'Current and future regulatory requirements that impact on the safe commercial and recreational use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and associated systems' released on 31st July 2018 and the NASA research document on the impact of drone noise (<https://qz.com/1033675/a-nasa-study-found-drones-sound-more-annoying-to-people-than-cars-or-trucks-and-flying-them-higher-wont-help/>). These papers, and many others, note the significant risks associated with the employment of commercial and recreational drones being allowed without proper legislation and consultation being put in place at federal, state and local government levels.

Privacy Concerns

I am informed that Project Wing sends the images recorded by the drones during flight over the suburb of Bonython to a facility in the United States for a period of 30 days and then destroyed. This is extremely concerning. I am very concerned that the images may be accessed during the 30 days by any number of people or organisations for reasons that can only be speculated, otherwise why are the images stored at all? Given recent reports regarding adverse business practices by large corporations such as Google and the fines subsequently imposed, how can anyone have trust in the integrity of these companies?

Impact of the Drones:

When the drones began their deliveries at the start of the trial, the initial flight path was over or very near to our house. I became quite agitated and angry at the noise being generated by the drones and the impact on my and my wife's privacy in our own yards. My family and I remarked that as the day of deliveries progressed my agitation became more noticeable. Some residents of houses near to ours would have between 3 and 5 deliveries at the start of the delivery window most days, then again at around midday and again in the late afternoon. This meant that the delivery drones would fly over or near to our house at least 6 or 10 times on each occasion. Our house is very well insulated, with double-glazing on all glass windows and doors. This did not significantly lessen the noise heard inside our house, especially when the drone was in the hover mode for the actual delivery of the item ordered. The noise from the drones is very loud and distressing, even more so when we are outside our home, in the garden or simply relaxing with family and friends.

Project Wing later altered the majority of the flights to fly over the trees to the west of our house, over an established ACT Government approved mountain bike track, and then along Stranger Pond. While this did lessen the noise heard in our house, it was still very noticeable and annoying and simply moved the noise nearer to other residents.

Over the last century or more the use of land-based delivery vehicles has become an integral part of how we live and work. People have adapted to this and have sought ways to reduce the impact on their lives, with homes built to minimise external sounds, the use of one vehicle to make multiple deliveries and the introduction of electric vehicles. We decry the impact of vehicles on the roads and yet the intention of organisations such as Google and others, including the ACT Government, is to fill the skies with loud, invasive and unsightly drones. No consideration is given to the extremely detrimental effect this would have on citizens, the birdlife and other animals. Our homes are not built to negate noise from overhead. We enter our homes expecting to be able to enjoy some peace and quiet from the outside world should we want it. The advent of large numbers of drones flying low over our homes would have the very real possibility of harmful outcomes to many citizens.

Drone Use Contrary to Public Health:

Many governments, including the ACT Government, have properly promoted the need for citizens to become more active and health conscious, to limit or negate the incidence of obesity and mental health problems that have become more evident in recent years, and to become more neighbourhood aware. The advice from most professionals and politicians has been for people to not consume excess "fast foods", to be more active through walking, cycling and other similar activities and to get to know their neighbours or be involved with community groups. And yet the ACT Government, in partnership with Project Wing, has knowingly and deliberately encouraged people to stay within their home environment, have fast foods and other small items delivered directly to them and to show a disregard for their neighbours when subjecting them to the noise and privacy deprivation inherent in the use of delivery drones. I am aware that conflict between neighbours has occurred because of the frequent presence of the Project Wing drones.

Impact on Local Businesses:

The Project Wing drone delivery trial was ill-conceived and contrary to the promotion of local businesses. The companies initially included in the delivery trial were not local businesses but had the effect of drawing customers away from local businesses. Such an example was the use of Chemist Warehouse, a company not previously operating in the vicinity of the suburbs surrounding the South.Point shopping complex in Tuggeranong. The use of this company was contrary to the promotion of local pharmacies, some of which also had home delivery services available. Such behaviour is similar to the large supermarkets deliberately undercutting and then destroying the small businesses in the area to ensure a complete lack of competition.

2) The economic benefit of drone delivery technology being tested in the ACT;

I believe that the trial of the delivery drones by Project Wing over Bonython does not give a true representation of the actual cost of providing items to households, nor does it give any indication of what return might be made to the ACT Government. For this particular trial, the charge for the

delivered item to the resident only covered the cost of, say, the coffee or burrito but did not include the expenses incurred by Project Wing for the actual delivery. This, therefore, does not give an accurate picture of how much a resident of any suburb in Canberra might be charged if all factors in the delivery process were included in the final fee. Project Wing cannot realistically determine how many citizens would have taken up the service if the true, total cost of each delivery was charged. Without a true representation of the potential number and cost of deliveries and therefore the gross income generated, it cannot be concluded what the economic benefit might be to the Government and people of the ACT.

4) The extent of any environmental impact as a result of trialling drone delivery technology on;

During the months of operation of the drones over Bonython, it became clear that the wildlife previously seen near our house was not present. Prior to the drones operating, there were at least two groups of magpies occupying the trees near our house. They were regularly calling to each other or disputing territory. When the drones started flying in the area the magpies were no longer evident. Other birds such as parrots were also not seen flying over or near to our house. The many kangaroos previously seen feeding in the fire break immediately in front of our house also ceased to be evident.

5) Ways to improve the use of drone delivery technology within the ACT

I encourage and support the use of drones for appropriate purposes such as by emergency (police, fire, search and rescue) and life saving services, power line inspections, shark patrols, research by government and academic institutions, land mapping, various elements of our defence forces and deliveries to remote properties and communities, especially in emergency situations.

However, I do not agree that drone technology can be improved with regard to the use of drones to deliver goods to suburban homes anywhere in the ACT as I strongly believe that there is no place for this service to be used in the ACT, or in any metropolitan area in Australia. I believe that this would be contrary to the peace and amenity that we have worked hard to achieve in our preferred place of living, particularly having lived through the unpleasant experience of the Project Wing trial in Bonython.