



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

Submission Number: 150

Date Authorised for Publication: 13 March 2019

Committee Support Office
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601

Submission for the Inquiry into drone delivery systems in the ACT

EXPERIENCES OF A BONYTHON DRONE TRIAL PARTICIPANT

I am writing as a first hand participant in the drone trial, and a Bonython resident. I have also previously contacted Gai Brodtmann on this matter.

This submission pertains predominately to my family and friends' experiences with delivery drones predominately in relation to the issues outlined in *Section D of the Terms of Reference*.

My submission will focus briefly on three key elements:

- 1) Perspective of a positive experience of a Bonython drone trial participant – impact on persons, environment and animals;
- 2) Concerns about the erroneous and hyperbolic nature of complaints by many (not all) of those against the trial; and
- 3) Questions about the potential politicised stifling of progress.

A first-hand experience

We were delighted to hear that the drone trial would be occurring in our suburb. It was brought to our attention through a flyer, promotion through the local primary school, and through the open day community event in Tuggeranong (which my Husband took our Son to). We had also previously known two families who had positive engagement with the trial in Royalla NSW. Having young children (aged 8 and 4) who were excited about the trial, we signed up as participants. From that point communication and service between Wing and our family was timely, personable and effective. We used the drone service 1-2 times per week. Many weeks we did not use it at all or if we did have chemist items we needed or visitors who wanted to see the drone, we would sometimes use it an extra time. Our use was less frequent when we heard about the concerns of others in our suburb. The service was not without minor mishap - such as the odd missed order, or concerns over drop points due to foliage - as they worked through bugs (this is in fact the point of a 'trial'), but solutions were always responsive and well thought out. We feel overall that our family and community benefited from the opportunity to participate in this innovative, world-first trial. Being part of the trial is something Canberra should showcase, regardless of the long-term outcomes. It shows that our nation's capital is open to new experiences and technologies, and can be a home ground for innovation. Participation and promotion does not necessarily assume final endorsement. My Husband and I have discussed that while our experience with drone delivery has been positive, given the early days of testing, we cannot yet decide if we are fully "for" drone delivery, until we know the nature, extent and governance of its long-term use. We have optimism and curiosity but not without a healthy level of reservation. As such, the following thoughts are based solely on our personal experience in the Bonython Wing Trial of 2018/2019.

Our main 'take-aways' and experiences can be summarised as follows:

- **Innovation:** The drones are an innovative and exciting technology (particularly for young people and children to 'be part of'). There was much enthusiasm from our children in learning about them and seeing them in action. Drones and other ubiquitous, mobile and aerial technologies will potentially be a significant part of their future and we are pleased to have been part of the advent for new uses in Canberra;
- **Usefulness:** There has been vocal conjecture about the benefits of the trial, and an implied frivolousness due to some of the available delivery options e.g. foods. We believe the use of burritos, coffee and chocolates were a good way to make the trial attractive and novel to test and pave the way for other product delivery in future. We found the drone delivery service to be handy in delivering items quickly and efficiently when it was otherwise not feasible or preferable for us to leave the house e.g. we ordered lunch one day when we were sweaty and dirt covered from landscaping the garden with our two children, and on a few occasions I was able to order much needed chemist products when myself and my children were unwell or without car. I would have otherwise been at pains to rush to a chemist. I anticipate personally, that the real benefits of technology and service like this will be in providing essential items to people who have mobility or access issues. I hope to see this element of its potential expanded.
- **Non-invasive:** My Husband and I were both legitimately surprised and disappointed to hear half-way through the trial that there was a group of Bonython residents (whom we did not know) who were vehemently against the trial. We did take their experiences into account and did in fact reduce our use of the service - reporting so to Wing. We did not want to be a noise burden or source of stress to anyone living closer to the launch point. That said, we did begin to question the motives and real experiences of some of the complainants - when the dialogue took on such a negative tone, often seeming contrived and exaggerated. We would like to note the following in terms of how invasive we found the drones to be:
 - *Noise:* They are indeed somewhat 'noisy' only as they land directly above you. This noise is fleeting and experienced mostly by the person/s receiving the delivery. This noise was inoffensive to us when nearby neighbours (some who received several deliveries a week) were receiving their deliveries. When inside our home, the sound of a drone passing by sounds about the same level as a mosquito next to your ear – even when it passed directly past our house. Often I wasn't sure if I heard one or not. The sound of my Husband ordering something while my Son napped, was not enough to wake him. Sounds which we find more offensive in our neighbourhood include: dogs incessantly barking; motorbikes that illegally ride upon the pathways past our house at night; loud music and partying from an inconsiderate neighbour most weekends in summer until midnight; wipper snippers and other garden machines (necessary and acceptable of course, but certainly more unpleasant as far as noise is concerned). Our small dog, who barks when other dogs set her off, thunder rumbles or if a stranger visits, did not seem concerned by the drones.;
 - *Privacy:* The drones flew at a height and speed in which we doubt there would be any concern for privacy when we were in our homes. It would have been near impossible for a drone to capture footage or visual of our family when we were in our house. Perhaps due to our location, drones never flew over our backyard so again, we were not concerned about the privacy for our children. We were informed that the camera only switches on for 'safety and guidance' upon drop. My greater concerns would be not in whether footage was taken, but how customer

data is stored, shared and protected and by whom. This however is a commercial data concern beyond the hardware of the drones, and a question for retailers in general – be they online, mobile, bricks and mortar etc. I would personally be more concerned about people utilising private/personal-use drones in a way that is deviant or anti-social, as they would remain unchecked.

- *Impact on nature:* We have heard it commented that the drones drove wildlife away from the suburb of Bonython. We have not experienced this but cannot speak for other parts of the suburb where this may be true. We are active gardeners and have an abundance of bees, lizards and birds in our yard. We also have domestic pets (a dog, cat and two rabbits). We are near to the Stranger Hills nature reserve which has no shortage of kangaroos. We love to walk up there and never heard a drone while on our usual trek around the hill towards Gordon. Cars are a greater threat to kangaroos, wombats and pets than drones. All-in-all I find it ironic that environment is being used as an argument *against* drones. They have a low carbon footprint and have the potential to reduce the number of vehicles on the road in a longer-term if used strategically. I did however see a local magpie swoop the drones a few times, and as such, there is a safety element and balance that needs to be considered – though these birds also swoop bicycle riders, children and dogs.
- *Safety:* I don't know about this. This is probably my biggest area of concern. What would happen if one of these drones drops down on top of someone? I have no further comment on this, except to say that I hope that precautions and mitigations are taken seriously.
- **Polarising:** Clearly based on the feedback and vocal opinions of some residents, the drones are not loved by all and there is some resistance and mistrust of their use. We respect our fellow neighbours and feel for anyone who was legitimately, measurably and negatively impacted by the trial - real or perceived threats to their emotional wellbeing. This is a concern for us as it did tend to “divide” our suburb. It did make us more mindful of our own thoughts on the drones, and impact on others. We will watch with interest to see what happens on the North of Canberra.

Feedback, complaints and representation

We first became aware of the position and complaints of other Bonython Residents, who had formed some kind of a citizens group against drones, when we made comments on a public social media post by Mick Gentleman. My Husband and two fellow neighbours had voiced some positive experiences with the trial and were consequently contested (in borderline attacking commentary) on social media. We decided to opt out of all public commentary after this for our family's wellbeing.

I also received a loud knock at the door one day as my Son napped. It was a Bonython man with a handheld “survey” asking me to essentially sign a petition against the drones under the guise of a statistical survey of local opinions. When I politely said I couldn't talk at that time as my Son had been woken, but that I was not against them, he looked aghast and left without obviously recording my response. I was later confused to see varying claims that between 80%-90% of residents were against the trial. Our thoughts on this are as follows:

- No genuine attempt was made to canvass the opinions and experiences of Bonython residents as a whole. Any complaint figures seem anecdotal and heavily loaded with agenda. The statistical representations of for and against are invalid. They are not an unbiased

representative sample. I would contest any suggestion that the methods used to arrive at this figure are valid. I find it somewhat insulting and inaccurate that these figures were used publicly by politicians and media.

- From our personal experience and perceptions of what was occurring through social media and in appeals made to local Members, was that a highly mobilised group - representing a minority of Bonython residents - vocally opposed the trial and relentlessly took down the opinions and ideas of anyone who contradicted them.
- The arguments against the trial ranged from valid and worthy of consideration and response, through to absurd conspiracy theories with no scientific or factual basis. We have read some claims in the media of people who believe the drones are spying in their windows, to those who claim that neighbours are receiving 30 or so deliveries a day. We would have been hard pressed to hear or see 30 drones *a week* – including those at a distance. The level of hysteria, aggression and fact-fudging was indicative of a broader agenda or possible mental ill health of some of the vocally negative residents (the latter not to be taken lightly and I have sympathy here). While I would never wish to minimise the experiences of someone legitimately aggrieved or hurt by such a trial (and in fact we did feel sad about their comments and chose to use the service less), I do question the validity of a large portion of the complaints. I would be curious to know how many were repeat complainers to Members and the trial company, rather than new complaints.

Progress and concerns

Overall I feel that drones are a sign-of-the-times, and the inevitable. They have many positive uses with environmental, safety and security, wellbeing and convenience benefits. They are not without their cons: some noise, concerns around privacy, and concerns around safety. For me however, the trial represented an opportunity to address some of these issues. My hope is that strict guidelines and laws that protect people, animals and places will be implemented to ensure that this technology is used in a purposeful way.

I am disappointed at the outcome of the trial in our area, and that it was not possible for the delivery to become permanent. We feel we would have liked to continue using it – perhaps not with the frequency as during the trial, but as needed. I feel the vocal politicising of an issue by a small and active group of Bonython residents, was somewhat ‘anti-progressive’. I would not be surprised if the fact that it had been approved by a local Labor Member had not been one of the reasons this was so aggressively and publicly shot down (given Bonython is the home turf of a local Liberal representative), and I would – on a hunch and with no real basis admittedly - question the motives of some of the particularly aggressive complaint makers.

One day my children, when they are grown, will look back and muse about being involved in a trial that was a first of its kind in the world. By then, this technology will be well established or replaced by something else. It seems futile to resist change and progress, particularly when we can instead participate, provide constructive (not aggressive and politically charged) feedback, and push for positive changes to ensure this technology and service is safe, effective and positive for everyone. This was an opportunity missed to gain a middle ground through constructive discussion. I think those who are against the drones for the ‘sake of being against something different’, will find themselves on the wrong-side of progress in the long-run. I would rather we now focus our attentions on ensuring that dialogue is open for improvements, so that these services can be implemented for purpose and convenience and not just for profit.

Conclusion:

I am not without reservation around the future drones, but would like to wrap-up by highlighting that this is why it is important to trial and discuss these new ventures. I do applaud the seriousness with which the experience of Canberrans is being taken into account. While some residents did not see the value of the trial that does not mean that the service was without value.

Our experiences with the trial were mostly positive, and we wish that the drone service was more broadly available in future and that it included additional products for delivery. We do however respect that not everyone has had a positive experience, and we hope that this will be considered in future iterations of the technology and service, so that they can strive to make delivery drones: quieter, safer, less invasive and more purposeful.

Contact:

I hope that my submission will be considered within the inquiry. I would prefer my personal details be kept confidential and I do not wish to participate face-to-face in any aspects of the inquiry. I do not wish to open myself or my family up to further discussion with 'anti-drone' protesters. My full name and address details can be obtained for your records upon request.

I am available for contact regarding this written submission via the following email:

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