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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 systems in the ACT

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To the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the following:

The extent of any environmental impact as a result of trialling drone delivery technology on residents within the area, native wildlife and domestic animals

I have been a resident of Bonython for 9 years and chose to live here because of the suburbs close proximity to nature reserve and peaceful amenity. In mid July 2018 I received a card in my letterbox asking if I was interested in receiving deliveries of goods via drone. It was not something I needed and put the card in my recycling bin, thinking nothing further about it.

On Saturday 28 July 2018 I was walking with my children in reserve near Pine Island. Suddenly above us we heard what sounded like a large high pitched motor tearing through the sky, the noise reverberating around us, scattering the large group of kangaroos near us in all directions because they were startled. That was the start of my negative experience of living under the flight path of Project Wing delivery drones, which continued until the trial concluded on 2 February 2019.

The drones would fly over my home between 7.15am to 4pm Thursday to Saturday and from 8.15am to 4pm on Sundays. Towards the end of the trial, they flew Tuesday to Saturday. The invasive noise of the aircraft (a high pitched, strong motorised noise, with a loud howling noise that is haunting) woke my household in the morning. I was shocked at how loud they were, given it was winter, windows were closed, and the central heating was on. I found it hard to think when working from home, and my children found it hard to concentrate on school work, as every time a drone flew over my house, the noise could not be blocked out or ignored. If any of us were unwell, we were unable to sleep during the day, as every drone that flew over our home woke us. For example, one Saturday afternoon I had a migraine, and the invasive high pitched noise of the drone was so painful to me, I turned the extraction fan on in my ensuite to listen to it, to help me block out the noise of the drones.

After 7 weeks of living under the flight path of the drone aircraft, the noise was seriously wearing us down. Everyone in my family was distressed because we had lost the comfort of

the peaceful sanctuary that was once our home. My children asked me when the drones would stop flying, because they couldn't stand the noise anymore. We started to dread our weekends, because we knew we were going to have to deal with the drones. I had to plan outings to take my children away from the suburb, so they would have a break from the noise. We avoided going for walks in the reserve during operating hours of the drones, as it was impossible to enjoy the serenity of our bushland because it was filled with intolerable drone noise. I also noticed a flock of pink galahs that lived at the front of my house were gone. Thankfully the birds came back two weeks after the drone trial finished in February 2019.

I found other residents in my neighbourhood were very upset about the drone noise too. It was the talk of the suburb. Elderly residents were upset by the noise as they tried to garden in their normally peaceful backyards. A veteran was so distressed by the noise it triggered his PTSD and he had to go back on his medication. Another resident, a WW2 veteran said the drones made him distressed because they reminded him of bombing during the war. My neighbours' 3 year old granddaughter was too scared to go outside and play when she came to visit because she was spooked by the drones. Dogs barked more often and for longer periods when the drone trial was on. It's as if the whole suburb was freaking out from the noise and visual disturbance of the delivery drones.

The extent of regulatory oversight of drone technology at various levels of government

I called Access Canberra and was told to take my concerns over the noise and the drone trial to Airservices Australia. Airservices told me they had no remit over drone noise or activities, and that I needed to contact CASA as they were responsible for drones. When I spoke with their representative they said their remit over delivery drones was only for safety, and that if I had any problems regarding the noise I should contact Project Wing. The point of contact for noise complaints was the company making the noise? This was outrageous to me. I looked into getting the EPA into the suburb to measure the noise, but discovered their remit did not include drones as they were classed as aircraft. The Environment Protection Act 1977 does not cover noise from aircraft. No local or federal government body was responsible for monitoring the drone noise. I also found out from CASA that whilst they had set Project Wing specific regulations for the operation of delivery drones in Bonython, the company was self reporting any safety incidents to them. No government agency was monitoring the trial or assessing its outcome on behalf of the community.

The decision to base the trials of the technology in the ACT and surrounding region

The ACT Government, Project Wing and CASA worked together to bring the trial to fruition. **They never consulted with Bonython residents before the approval and set up of the drone trial.** Through FOI, I read the Risk Management assessment for "The use of delivery drones in the ACT-Project Wing January 2018" done by the department of Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development. I discovered the government was aware that the delivery drones were noisy, could be seen to be invading ones privacy as they filmed and collected data, and could be a safety risk. Many times in the document it was mentioned that the ACT Government "seek feedback from the community about their views" and "ensure a strong complaints handling process at the licensing stage". None of these things transpired. The Risk Management report also said, "While legal liability may not rest with the ACT

Government for a safety incident, reputational damage may be suffered as the ACT Government has allowed the project to take place”.

I find it extremely concerning and odd that the ACT Government did not let the residents of Bonython know that drones were to fly over their homes. They did not set up a formal mechanism for feedback, given this was supposedly a trial. Did they not want to hear from major stakeholders about their experience of drone delivery? Given the trial was to test new technology in a suburban environment, and that had never been done in the world before, shouldn't the ACT Government have required Project Wing to ask residents for consent to fly these aircraft over their homes?

In the Human Rights ACT 2004 Sect 10 Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment etc “(2) No one may be subjected to medical or scientific experimentation or treatment without his or her free consent”. Many residents of Bonython felt they were treated like guinea pigs in an experiment. People felt used and angry. Their distress did not matter to the ACT Government who approved the trial, or Project Wing who continued the trial, even though they knew so many people, pets and birdlife were negatively affected by it and the quality of their lives diminished. I feel the human rights of residents in Bonython were violated. In the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 12 Right to Privacy “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence”. That is exactly what happened to the residents of Bonython. The ACT Government arbitrarily decided to make the residents subject to a trial of new technology without our permission, agreement or input. When drones flew over our homes recording data, our privacy was compromised. My family was impacted for 6 months by invasive drone noise and we had no recourse to stop the trial. We often feared the drones would fall out of the sky on windy days as the aircraft wobbled/struggled to right themselves after a delivery. I saw a magpie swoop a drone during a flight.

In a Canberra Times article of 22 July 2017 “Canberra Airport not told about Project Wing drone delivery testing nearby at Googong”, by Elliot Williams, residents in Fernleigh Park were also not advised that drones were to fly. They found them noisy, the drones spooked their horses and they also had concerns about privacy. They wanted the trial to stop. Residents also said they were unhappy with the lack of initial consultation, and one resident “believed Project Wing only consulted with the community after she posted her disapproval on social media”. Project Wing also did not consult with the Canberra airport before the delivery drone trial commenced, “despite the test area falling less than two kilometres from the airport’s controlled airspace”. It seems like Project Wing have a pattern of non consulting behaviour. Why?

I find it interesting that residents in both Fernleigh Park and Bonython had the same reactions to the drones, and wanted the trials to stop. Bonython residents organised a petition and obtained over 1,000 signatures demanding the drone trial cease. MLA Mick Gentleman was asked by the Bonython community to come and meet with them in the suburb to discuss their concerns and he refused. He did have time though, in late 2017, to fly to Google offices in the USA and meet with them. The EPSD Risk Management report for Project Wing drones was done a few months after the US meeting. Via FOI I read the lease agreement for Project Wings use of the land in Greenway and it was under Googles name. So much for Google not setting up a base here in the ACT as mentioned in a Canberra Times article of 27 August 2018, by Blake Foden, “Minister offers Google support for ACT

office, drone trials stepped up". Mr Gentleman said "We'd like to take any opportunity we can to help them, as long as the Canberra community is on board as well". Did Minister Gentleman formally ask residents their views? No, he did not.

Three members of the Bonython Against Drones action group did eventually meet with him but he only gave them half an hour of his time in November 2018. It became obvious to residents that their negative experience was really of no great concern to Mr Gentleman. In a letter of reply to me he wrote:

"Project Wing's delivery drones are an entirely new business model. This trial is providing an opportunity to learn about the challenges and opportunities presented by delivery drone technology, including community concerns about noise. I appreciate your feedback as this will inform the ongoing development of the business model".

"Business model"?! Are the ACT Government and Project Wing one in the same? The development of their "business model" was more important than residents' quality of life for 6 months. It was totally ok to disrupt the lives of young mothers and babies who were trying to sleep during the day. Totally ok that sick people recovering from surgery couldn't go outside and sit in the sun in peace and quiet as they had been advised by their doctor. Totally ok that residents were so stressed by the drone noise they were in tears dreading their next migraine knowing the drone noise exacerbated their pain. This is why the majority of residents under the flight path of the drones have been relentless against the Project Wing trial. It damaged our community in a very real and visceral way. I will never forget the haunting sound of the drones. It is embedded in my limbic system now.

In summary

The peaceful amenity of our homes is the foundation of our lives, and is crucial to our health and well being. In 2015 the United Nations launched the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Goal 9 is Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:

"And we will live in a world where our industry our infrastructure and our best innovations are not just used to make money, but to make all our lives better".

Having a toasty, muffin, Mexican food or coffee delivered by drone is not something Canberrans really need. We can all pick up these items easily in our weekly shop or on our way to or from work. Grocery stores offer home delivery.

What I cannot buy from anywhere is the quiet comfort of my home. If drones never deliver another croissant no one will suffer. However, if 11,000 drone deliveries a day are permitted over Canberra as Project Wing have stated in the media as their goal, thousands of Canberrans will no longer enjoy peaceful suburbs and the beautiful mountain framed clear skies our bush capital provides. Are we expected to sacrifice our whole way of life to benefit a foreign drone company? The unique character of our nature filled city will cease to exist. I have lived this reality. It is a nightmare.

