



Australian Association for Unmanned Systems

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## **Press Release: AAUS Urges for Cool Heads to Prevail on Drone Regulation Discussion**

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In response to the recent call by Senator Barry O'Sullivan to take urgent action over the sale and regulation and sale of drones in Australia due to the risk that they pose to manned aircraft, the Australian Association for Unmanned Systems (AAUS) is advocating for a rational discussion on the regulation of drones or remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) based on fact.

The facts are:

- RPAS can be operated in Australia commercially by commercial operators as well as for recreational purposes.
- CASA were the first country in the World to regulate the use of RPAS in 2002 (Civil Aviation Safety Regulation Part 101).
- The regulations have allowed the growth of an emerging drone industry in Australia.
- Depending on the use (commercial or recreational), different regulations apply. In general, the regulations are risk-based, so higher risk operations require are regulated to a higher standard.
- In September 2016, CASA amended the regulations that apply to commercial operators only.
- The changes effectively removed red tape for low risk RPAS operations within the limitations of standard operating conditions.
- Some parts of aviation industry expressed concern with the amended regulations and as a result a Senate Inquiry on current and future regulatory requirements that impact on the safe commercial and recreational use of RPAS was triggered.
- The Senate Inquiry which has sought submissions from Industry is still running and has been extended until December 2017.
- In March 2017, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) performed a safety analysis on RPAS safety occurrences and implications for traditional aviation. It reported that the growth in the number of remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) in Australia is increasing exponentially and that this presents an emerging and insufficiently understood transport safety risk.
- In association with the level of growth, the number of RPAS-related safety occurrences reported to the ATSB has increased exponentially during the 2012 to 2016 period. About half of the 180 occurrences from 2012 to 2016 involved near encounters with manned aircraft. Over 60 per cent of all reported RPAS near encounters (108 occurrences) occurred in 2016 (69 occurrences). Statistical models forecast a 75 per cent increase in the number of near



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encounters in 2017. Most occur in capital cities, Sydney in particular, and mostly above 1,000 ft above mean sea level (AMSL).

- To date, there have been no reported collisions between RPAS and manned aircraft in Australia.
- Almost half of all reported near encounters involved high capacity air transport aircraft.
- Taking into account hours flown, helicopters were over-represented in RPAS near encounters.
- The majority of near encounters took place above 1,000 ft above mean sea level (AMSL), with about half between 1,000 ft and 5,000 ft. Around 16 per cent were above 5,000 ft.
- As RPAS are almost never identified for these occurrences, the ATSB does not know if they were certified RPAS, model aircraft, or toys. Given the heights (mostly above 1,000 ft), locations (mostly urban areas), and over-representation of weekends for reported near encounters, the ATSB surmised that it is likely the majority of RPAS involved were not being used commercially.
- The standard operating conditions for uncertified RPAS in Civil Aviation Safety Regulation Part 101 include visual line of sight, less than 400 ft, outside of controlled airspace and 5 km away from aerodrome boundaries and in non-populated areas. As most reported near encounters occurred outside of these conditions, it appears that the operators of these RPAS were either unaware or were unconcerned about these rules.

### **Message from AAUS:**

AAUS supports CASA regulatory efforts on various consultative committees and panels. We believe that Australia is well positioned to grow a substantial drone industry on the back of the CASA drone regulations and opportunities to service agricultural, mining and other surveying applications in its' wide open spaces. Rather than restrict the growth on the drone industry based on speculation (or selected data), we remain firm that CASA is on the right track with its risk based approach to regulations for the drone industry.

Based on data available, it is clear that most of the safety issues have been caused by people operating outside of the current regulations (CASR Part 101) either unknowingly or deliberately and include a high proportion of recreational operators. AAUS recognises the need to address safety concerns based on safety occurrences identified by the ATSB and is supportive of the Senate Inquiry. In the meantime, we will continue to promote safety and endeavour to raise awareness of the regulations.

To this end, AAUS is running a conference in Canberra (titled RPAS in Australian Skies) involving RPAS, aviation and regulatory experts to discuss the safe integration of RPAS into Australian Airspace (<http://www.aaus.org.au/page-18121>).



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## About AAUS

The Australian Association for Unmanned Systems (AAUS) is Australia's oldest and largest industry advocacy group for unmanned systems. AAUS represents unmanned systems across all three domains: land, sea and air. AAUS' objective is to promote a professional, safe and commercially viable unmanned systems industry.

## More Information

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