

25 May 2026

Secretariat
Uncrewed Systems Policy Team
Department of Home Affairs
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Dear Secretariat

Submission: Consultation on proposed approaches to Australia's drone security

Canberra Airport appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Home Affairs' *Drones Security: Public Consultation Paper*.

There is an increasing need to address the security risks posed by drones, particularly in the vicinity of critical infrastructure assets such as airports. For this reason, Canberra Airport supports the development of a national policy framework to strengthen drone-specific security settings. A coordinated national approach would likely assist in reducing the misuse of drones around airports.

The uptake of personal and commercial drones over the past decade has contributed to a significant increase in unauthorised drone activity in the vicinity of Canberra Airport. This reflects the trends identified in the consultation paper, which notes that improved accessibility, affordability and ease of use have driven a sharp rise in drone activity around critical infrastructure assets. While most drone operators are well-intentioned, often seeking to capture photographs or video of the Canberra landscape from nearby lookouts, the inadvertent misuse of drones can create safety risks within the airport's protected airspace.

Canberra Airport facilitates approximately 37,000 regular public transport movements each year. Unauthorised drone activity in or near the flight paths around the airport, therefore, creates an unacceptable safety risk for aircraft arriving or departing the airport. Any collision between a drone and an aircraft could have serious consequences for passenger safety, airport operations and the broader aviation network.

Canberra Airport also operates in a uniquely sensitive environment by regularly accommodating military and VIP aircraft movements. This leads to additional national

security implications for unauthorised drone activity in and around the airport. This further highlights the need for a nationally coordinated, security-led response.

As the management of unauthorised drone activity around airports is fundamentally an airspace protection matter, the primary responsibility must be with Airservices Australia and CASA. As each is designated with airspace protection authority, they possess the expertise, systems and operational capability to manage threats within controlled airspace. Centrally, this would include tracking, monitoring and preventing unauthorised drone activity around airports.

Although restrictions are already in place to limit drone use around airports, they do not appear to be effective in reducing unauthorised drone activity around Canberra Airport. Drones weighing more than 250 grams are prohibited from operating within 5.5 kilometres of a controlled airport and all drones are prohibited from flying in aircraft approach and departure paths. Despite these clear restrictions imposed by CASA, unauthorised drone activity continues to occur in the vicinity of Canberra Airport, indicating that current enforcement processes are not as effective as they need to be. Strengthening enforcement action will be necessary to reduce the growing prevalence of unauthorised drone activity around airports.

There is also a need to improve the approval and coordination framework for authorised drone activities within controlled airspace. Under current arrangements when drone use is approved within exclusion zones, the approval process lacks clarity and consistency. While Airservices Australia and CASA generally administer approvals, notification to key stakeholders, including airport operators, is not always provided or is inconsistent. This creates an operational risk for airport operators as there is no awareness that authorised drone activity may be occurring in close vicinity to the airport.

There must be a requirement for real-time notification and information sharing with affected stakeholders when drones are authorised to be used within or near controlled airspace around airports. Improving the coordination of communication would ensure that airport operators are not adversely impacted.

Canberra Airport supports the expansion of counter-drone capabilities and enhanced powers for authorised agencies. It is critically important that law enforcement agencies and regulators are equipped with the appropriate authority, technology and resources to detect, track and disrupt unauthorised drone activity, particularly around airports.

Given the technical complexity and risks associated with counter-drone technologies, it is necessary that the management and deployment of such capabilities should remain within the remit of authorised and appropriately trained operators. There should be no expectation that airport operators would be required to deploy or manage counter-drone technologies. Centrally, this is a security and law enforcement function, not an operational responsibility of airport operators.

In addition, it would not be reasonable for airport operators to be mandated to have primary responsibility for monitoring, detecting or tracking unauthorised drone activity. While airports play an important role in reporting and coordination, imposing additional regulatory and operational burden would divert resources from core aviation safety and security functions.

Canberra Airport is also supportive of improved identification and tracking requirements for drones. The current framework only requires certain commercial operators to register their drones, which does not reflect the significant growth in recreational drone use. A more comprehensive registration system would increase the ability of authorities to effectively monitor and respond to unauthorised drone activity, regardless of whether it is operated for commercial or recreational purposes.

In finalising the national policy framework, Canberra Airport believes there must be consideration of:

- Prioritising the need to protect the safety and security of critical infrastructure assets, particularly airports, from unauthorised drone activity
- Expanding the powers available to law enforcement agencies and regulators to respond effectively to drone threats around airports
- Establishing an identification system so that commercial and recreational drones are registered in a central database
- Avoiding the transfer of regulatory and operational burden onto airport operators for managing and monitoring unauthorised drone activity

There is a clear need for a coordinated national policy framework to address the increase in unauthorised drone activity around critical infrastructure assets, such as airports. Canberra Airport appreciates the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper and would welcome further engagement from the Department as it formulates a national security response to drones.

Yours sincerely



Michael Thomson
Head of Aviation

