

Qantas Group Submission

Response to Drones Security Public Consultation Paper

Qantas Group welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Australian Government's consultation on strengthening Australia's approach to drone security as outlined in the consultation paper.

As a major aviation operator with global operations, Qantas Group recognises both the significant benefits of drone technology and the increasing security risks posed by its misuse, particularly in the vicinity of Designated Airports and within controlled airspace. Ensuring the continued safe and secure operation of aviation infrastructure is fundamental to national connectivity, economic stability, and public confidence.

Aviation Security Risk and Operational Impact

Qantas Group strongly supports the paper's acknowledgement that drones represent a rapidly evolving and complex security threat due to their accessibility, capability, and ability to operate beyond traditional security boundaries. From an aviation perspective, this risk is particularly acute.

Drone incursions into or near Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports have the potential to:

- disrupt aircraft operations, including departures, arrivals, and ground movements;
- trigger airspace closures or operational restrictions;
- create collision risks with crewed aircraft;
- interrupt critical aviation infrastructure and navigation systems; and
- cause cascading network disruptions across domestic and international services.

Maintaining continuous operations at Designated and Tier 1 Airports is critical to the functioning of the aviation system and the broader economy. Even short-term disruptions can have disproportionate operational, financial, and broader economic impacts. As such, drone threats should be treated as a priority aviation security risk requiring a coordinated and proactive response.

Need for Effective Counter Drone Capabilities

Qantas Group supports the proposed strengthening of counter drone capabilities, including the ability to detect, identify, and mitigate unauthorised drone activity in sensitive aviation environments.

Effective countermeasure capability is essential to managing real time threats. In particular:

- rapid detection and tracking is necessary to provide situational awareness and enable timely operational decision making;
- electronic countermeasures, where appropriately authorised and controlled, provide a critical option to safely disrupt or neutralise a drone without causing collateral harm; and
- deployment of these capabilities must be carefully integrated within aviation environments to ensure no unintended interference with aircraft systems, communications, or navigation infrastructure.

In this context, Qantas Group considers it essential that permanently available counter drone capabilities are established at all Designated and Tier 1 Airports, aligned with Australia's critical infrastructure security framework and legislative settings.

Specifically, we consider that:

- Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports should be recognised as critical infrastructure assets where drone threat mitigation forms an explicit component of protective security obligations;
- counter drone capability should be treated as a standing protective security control, consistent with critical infrastructure risk management requirements;
- capabilities should be operated under the control of authorised federal and state law enforcement agencies, supported by clear statutory powers, governance arrangements, and accountability mechanisms; and
- deployment models should align with broader critical infrastructure resilience obligations, ensuring preparedness, response capability, and recovery are integrated into existing security programs.

A standing, legislatively aligned capability model at Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports would ensure:

- immediate response to drone incursions without delay;
- consistent operational readiness across the national aviation network;

- clear command and control arrangements aligned with law enforcement and national security frameworks; and
- integration with airport operators, airlines, and air traffic management to minimise operational disruption.

Given the sensitivity of the aviation environment and the risks associated with radiofrequency-based countermeasures identified in the consultation paper, these capabilities should remain tightly controlled, centrally authorised, and deployed only by trained personnel operating under strict regulatory oversight.

Staying Ahead of Emerging Technology and Threats

Qantas Group strongly endorses a technology neutral and forward looking policy framework that can adapt to the pace of innovation in drone capabilities.

As identified in the consultation paper, drone technology is rapidly evolving, including increased autonomy, longer endurance, greater payload capacity, and enhanced resistance to mitigation measures. These developments increase the potential for more sophisticated and harder to detect threats.

In this context, it is critical that:

- regulatory and policy settings remain agile and regularly reviewed;
- government and industry maintain strong information sharing mechanisms on emerging threats and vulnerabilities;
- appropriate industry consultation and option assessment is conducted
- government investment is made in advanced detection, identification, and countermeasure technologies; and
- capability development anticipates future risks rather than reacting to incidents.

A threat informed, intelligence led approach will be essential to ensure that aviation security settings remain effective against evolving drone threats.

Importance of Identification and Accountability

Qantas Group supports measures to enhance drone identification and tracking, including electronic conspicuity solutions that improve visibility and accountability of drone operations.

Improved ability to identify drones and attribute activity to operators will:



- support faster and more proportionate response to incidents;
- reduce ambiguity between benign, negligent, and malicious activity;
- strengthen compliance and deterrence frameworks; and
- improve coordination between aviation, law enforcement, and security agencies.

These measures are particularly important in the operating environments of all aerodromes, and in particular Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports, where uncertainty regarding drone intent creates immediate operational and safety impacts.

Qantas Group also supports stronger entry controls for commercial and recreational drones, with particular focus on recreational drones. Commercial operators are generally subject to stronger safety, compliance, and governance expectations; however, recreational drones remain readily accessible and can present a material aviation operations and security threat when used negligently or maliciously. Greater controls at the point of sale, importation, activation, or first operation would help filter higher risk recreational drone activity before it reaches sensitive aviation environments.

Accountability should also be strengthened through expanded registration requirements, again with particular focus on recreational users. Where drones are capable of being used as a weapon or as a means of disrupting critical aviation infrastructure, registration and accountability settings should reflect the seriousness of that risk. This should include clear obligations to report lost or stolen drones, changes in ownership, and other events that may affect attribution or enforcement.

Qantas Group also considers that Australia should examine international models such as the United States Federal Aviation Administration Remote ID framework. Remote ID enables a drone in flight to provide identification and location information that can be received by other parties through a broadcast signal. Such capability would support attribution, law enforcement response, and operational decision making when drones are operating near airports or other sensitive aviation environments.

Balanced Approach to Safety, Security and Industry Growth

Qantas Group acknowledges the importance of balancing security outcomes with the continued growth and innovation of legitimate drone use across the economy.

We support a risk-based approach that targets enhanced controls in high risk environments, particularly Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports, minimises regulatory burden on compliant operators where appropriate, and provides clarity and certainty for industry participants.

However, in aviation environments, security considerations must take precedence given the potential consequences of a drone related incident.

Conclusion

Qantas Group supports the Australian Government's commitment to strengthening drone security arrangements and recognises the urgency of reform given the rapidly evolving threat environment.

Key priorities for Qantas Group include:

- recognition of drones as a significant and growing aviation security threat, particularly in and around Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports;
- meaningful consultation with government and Industry on solution options, proof of concept and trials before investment and implementation;
- careful consideration for establishment of permanently available counter drone capabilities at all Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports, aligned with critical infrastructure legislation and operated by authorised law enforcement agencies;
- participation and support to deployment of effective, authorised counter drone technologies, including electronic mitigation options;
- development of a forward looking, technology neutral regulatory framework that keeps pace with emerging risks;
- strengthened entry controls, registration obligations, and reporting requirements, particularly for recreational drone users;
- enhanced drone identification and accountability measures, including consideration of Remote ID capability; and
- protection of the continuity of operations at Designated Airports and Tier 1 Airports as a critical national priority.

Qantas Group looks forward to ongoing engagement with Government to ensure that policy and regulatory settings provide effective, proportionate, and operationally viable safeguards for the aviation sector.