

Submission to the Department of Home Affairs in Response to: Drone Security Public Consultation Paper 2026

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Executive Summary

The School of Aviation at the University of New South Wales Sydney (UNSW Sydney) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Drone Security Public Consultation Paper 2026*. As a premier tertiary institution spanning commercial crewed flight training, aviation management, and unique programs in drone operations and management, UNSW occupies a singular position in Australia's aviation education ecosystem.

We support the Australian Government's initiative to establish a robust, future-proof national security framework for uncrewed systems. We commend initiatives to ensure security objectives can work hand-in-hand with Australia's sovereign aviation capabilities including those related to training and education.

1. Proactive Management of Threats & Shared Airspace Protection

Our school operates a major crewed flight training program out of Bankstown, while also delivering our uncrewed systems programs involving training across Sydney, which means the security of shared airspace is a paramount priority.

- **Crewed Aviation Safeguards:** Rogue or uncoordinated drone activity near smaller airports presents an immediate risk to student pilots undertaking initial flight training. UNSW strongly endorses proactive threat management strategies that secure training airspaces, traffic bubbles, and approach paths. We suggest that it can be valuable for companies and organisations to actively work with our flight school and student pilots to better understand the real and perceived threats and their potential impact on flight operations at Bankstown Airport and student pilot preparedness and insight. Our school has significant expertise in human factors and safety that we can leverage to provide science-based insight into this area.
- **Integrating drone safety & security culture into education through data and knowledge sharing:** We would encourage the government to provide detailed case studies about known drone incidents, as such information could be incorporated into teaching and education at schools and universities like ours, thereby increasing knowledge about the security threat drones presents. Drawing on such information will help ensure the next generation of aviation leaders view safety and security as a singular, unified discipline that inevitably involves uncrewed systems now and in the future.

2. Counter-Drone Capabilities & Academic Research Pathways

As uncrewed threats evolve, the development of robust counter-drone (C-UAS) capabilities is essential. However, the legal and regulatory frameworks governing these technologies should account for higher education and R&D requirements.

- **Enabling Research Environments:** Universities serve as critical testbeds for threat mitigation, signal processing, and C-UAS vulnerability research. We recommend that the future framework

includes clear, streamlined pathways for accredited academic institutions to test, evaluate, and operate within simulated threat environments.

- **Collaboration with Security Agencies:** UNSW advocates for a collaborative model where tertiary institutions can partner directly with government and emergency services to provide data-driven insights into counter-drone capabilities and the public acceptance or perception of them. Here, universities can serve as independent bodies that help drive better understanding and progress through science rather than stakeholder initiatives that may be biased towards political or corporate outcomes.

3. Identification, Tracking, and Digital Conspicuity

UNSW supports the push toward enhanced electronic conspicuity and real-time tracking for uncrewed platforms, as long as any cost burden is not large and does not place all the emphasis entirely on end users, which would include our students (in education or private capacity) or industry partners. This should be up to manufacturers, and should not be geared towards popular sub 250g drones or even in sub 2kg drones being used in a hobbyist/private capacity. It should be noted that RC flying has increasingly become classified with “drones” but traditional hands-on-sticks RC flying is typically done in extremely safe, controlled, organised enthusiast settings and should not be subject to cost burdens to comply with identification and tracking regulations.

4. Balanced Enforcement & Regulatory Harmonization

A primary objective of the 2026 Consultation Paper is balancing enforcement with innovation. To achieve this, the division of responsibilities across government portfolios must be clear to operators.

- **Inter-Agency Cohesion:** To prevent fragmentation, it is essential that any new national security rules under the DHA are tightly harmonised with the safety regulations set out by Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Streamlining these frameworks ensures that commercial operators, students, and researchers face a single, cohesive compliance pathway, eliminating the potential for administrative overlap or conflicting operational mandates.

Enforcement mechanisms should clearly differentiate between malicious actors and compliant, highly regulated educational or commercial entities conducting advanced or experimental trials (such as BVLOS or multi-domain operations).

5. Multi-Domain Classifications & Future Workforce Development

For educational training and academic research, a security framework that defines trusted supply chains and hardware classifications will give educational institutions clear guidelines on procurement, ensuring compliance with national security benchmarks from the outset. At the moment it is a bit of the ‘Wild West’ in terms of equipment, where it comes from, who can buy it, and what gets placed into use. Clearer guidance on what is considered trusted and which manufacturers are preferred (without it needing to be a strict “blue list” or “cleared list” for anything other than security/defense applications) can help guide decision making, particularly since so many university-based researchers using drones are not particularly interested in the actual drone itself and may have limited budgets, knowledge, or technical savvy to navigate decision-making in this area.

Conclusion

UNSW Aviation believes that an effective drone security framework should be collaborative with universities, providing an excellent resource for partnering on studies involving safety, acceptance, perception, and effectiveness of new technologies. By prioritising electronic conspicuity for airspace safety, providing streamlined compliance pathways for education and research, and ensuring seamless harmony between safety and security regulators, the Australian Government can protect critical infrastructure while positioning Australia as a global leader in uncrewed system innovation.

We welcome further engagement with the Department of Home Affairs to assist in shaping these vital policies.