

Vince Sofia

Regulatory requirements that impact on the safe use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, Unmanned Aerial Systems and associated systems.

Inquiry Submission

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to consider my submission regarding the sub 2kg de-reg and associated changes to CASR PART 101.

I am a CASA licensed UOC holder (drone operator), and also a filmmaker with over 25 years industry experience. I have also been a recreational remote control model aircraft pilot for over 35 years, including holding an instructor rating for both fixed wing & helicopter's accordingly. As part of my work I have routinely needed the services of full size aircraft, & am also a certified Tyler Mount technician for fitting full size film camera systems to commercial helicopters. All of these factors combine to give me a good deal of insight & understanding of not only the use of UAV's(drones), but also the relationship between them & the full size aviation industry.

Although I fully support & encourage the use of drones recreationally, and with highly controlled conditions, I do not support, or agree with the changes that were implemented on Sep 29th 2016.

These being for a number of reasons as follows;

1 – The primary reason is that the sub 2kg de-reg is effectively a de-reg of the entire UAV(drone) industry. Essentially once material is acquired by an operator under the new laws, and supplied to a client there is no way of proving if it was indeed acquired legally through the use of a machine that did fall into the sub 2kg category. This fact was actually put to me by one of the many flourishing illegal drone operators currently trading. He has a smaller sub 2kg machine, and also a larger higher quality machine. The clients have no idea where that material comes from, and what the difference is in terms of weight class. So an operator such as himself only needs to state that he uses the sub 2kg machine for "commercial" work, and the larger machine for recreational use if any questions get asked. And any associated meta-data attached to the image/aircraft is easily overwritten or erased, so little more can be done to prove otherwise unless someone makes a formal complaint,

and is prepared to make themselves a witness to the use of the machine if that was indeed the case.

2 – The industry training & understanding of air law & obligations of a licensed operator will often mean saying “no” to potential work due to hazards and/or inability to fly due to airspace ect. Without this knowledge, or accountability the temptation to say “yes” by non UOC holders is very real & hard to dismiss. Often they simply don’t know, or understand the potential hazards, or simply feel they have very little too loose due to not having gone through the rigorous training, and licensing procedures. Licensed CASA UOC holders must as due course step through a risk assessment before each & every flight, regardless of weight class. Thus identifying any potential hazards, and either mitigating the risk to an acceptable level, or opting to terminate moving forward with the planed flight.

3 – CASA licensed operators have the ability to communicate directly with full size aircraft, and state their intentions & nominated flight areas. Non-licensed sub 2kg operators do not have this ability. And although they are not allowed to potentially fly in close proximity to high traffic areas for full size aircraft, there are often many circumstances where there will still be a conflict of airspace. Especially in regions dominated by agriculture where aircraft are frequently at altitudes between 50 & 200 feet. Ingesting a drone into the turbine intake, or striking a sensitive part of the aircraft in these circumstances would mean a catastrophic outcome for the pilot.

4 – Are CASA going to effectively police the new changes? Meaning, are they actually going to be weighing the aircraft used under the new changes? Not doing so quickly brings us back to point 1 above...

I could indeed list many other points, however I do understand that digesting all this material & subsequent arguments either way would be consuming, so I digress to add further.

However on a personal note, I myself have been contacted by local police conducting enquires regarding rouge drone use in my region. I have a good relationship with them, & they know that I am a licensed operator, & hoped accordingly that I may have had knowledge of who the person was causing privacy & safety issues in nearby a suburban area. They openly stated that they are preparing for more such similar issues with the rollout of the technology, & use by uncontrolled operators. Additionally this week I was sent a video by a client asking if some of the contained material could be used in an upcoming project. It was just shot by one of the new sub 2kg operators, and contains footage flying directly over an airport, including directly in the primary approach path, plus flying well within 30 meters of people & property. Examples such as this are relatively

common, and it should not fall into the hands of licensed drone operators to become a “watchdog” for CASA, nor do we want too, CASA have created this problem & it should not be up to other areas of the aviation industry to try keeping their sky’s safe.

Lastly it is very perplexing why CASA has even adopted this stance to implementing the de-reg, given that the rest of the world is clamping down even harder on their use, both recreationally & commercially. In many European countries the use of all UAV’s is deemed illegal across the board, and some they are even training hawks & falcons to disable the drone & bring it to the ground. So why CASA has opened up so many potential problems when the rest of the world thinks otherwise is a compelling question.

Again I thank you for your time & consideration of my comments...

Most sincere regards,

Vince Sofia