

I am an aeromodelling enthusiast. I build and fly radio controlled model aircraft for recreation. I am a member of the GALAHS model aircraft club at South Grafton who have their own model airfield and also a member of the Australian Miniature Aerosports Society. I have no commercial interest in model aircraft or remotely piloted aircraft systems.

I am concerned that the outcome of the senate inquiry into the regulatory requirements for RPAS will negatively impact the hobby of aeromodelling. Aeromodelling is almost as old as aviation itself and for many decades modelers have been enjoying this fascinating, educational and social hobby with no consideration from the population at large. The reason for our failure to make the news headlines is because we fly our models safely, responsibly and abide by CASA rules and guidelines. I and my fellow aeromodellers pride ourselves on our safety record and good standing within the community.

Unfortunately the recent availability of readymade drones has led to an increase in RPAS being flown by people with no knowledge of the rules or conventions of model aviation. This has been noticed by the media and has understandably raised safety concerns. Also unfortunate, is that the term RPAS not only applies to these drones, but also the hand built model aircraft and helicopters flown by aeromodelling enthusiasts. Thus any regulations introduced to curtail the unsafe or illegal use of drones will also affect responsible aeromodelling enthusiasts.

I would like to raise the following points which I hope can be considered

1- There are already sufficient regulations to stop consumers flying RPAS irresponsibly. CASAs CASR part 101 prohibits model aircraft of any type from flying near the public, buildings, cars or endangering air traffic. There is no need to introduce any further regulation as the current rules clearly deal with all the safety concerns. If any further action is needed it is a program of education by drone manufacturers and suppliers to ensure that all buyers are fully aware of the rules and penalties. More regulations would make no difference to the actions of uneducated consumers who do not know or care about the rules. But they could adversely affect responsible aeromodelling enthusiasts who already operate within the rules.

2- The danger drones pose to air traffic is largely a media creation. In a three year period (2011 to 2014) the International Civil Aviation Organisation logged 65,139 bird strikes to aircraft. To date the number of confirmed collisions between a drone and an aircraft is zero. Not a single one. On the 18th April 2016 the UK's newspapers reported the world's first drone strike when the pilot of an A320 on final approach to Heathrow reported his aircraft had been hit by a drone. A few days later the UK's transport minister Robert Goodwin told the papers that after close inspection there was no damage to the aircraft and the reported drone was thought to have been a plastic shopping bag floating on the wind. It was also suggested that airline pilots were reporting drone sightings because of a media generated fear of drones. When asked if there would be any regulations to stop drone strikes, Mr Goodwin said that the current regulations were enough.

Changes to regulations should be based on facts, not media driven hysteria.

3- The dangers posed by drones are being exaggerated by those with a pecuniary interest in drone use being restricted. A number of parties have contacted the government with safety concerns over drone use. These were mainly, if not entirely, licensed commercial UAV operators whose financial income will be significantly affected by the recent relaxation in rules to commercial use of drones under 2kgs. Now a business such as a real estate agent can take their own aerial photographs and don't have to pay commercial UAV operators. This has resulted in a serious case of sour grapes among commercial UAV

operators who are now trying to convince everyone that they are safe pilots but nobody else is. On the TV news recently a commercial UAV operator was interviewed. He told the inhabitants of Port Macquarie that they were now in danger of serious injury due to the changes in commercial drone rules. Of course he had no concerns over safety prior to realising that he would no longer be getting payed. I feel sorry for anyone whose livelihood is affected, but such blatant fabrications are not helpful. Any input from those whose views favour their own financial gain should at best be treated as dubious, and really ought to be disregarded entirely.

John Cook