

Emerging Aviation Technologies: National Aviation Policy Issues Paper

WALGA Submission

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About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based organisation representing and supporting the work and interests of 139 mainland Local Governments in WA, plus the Indian Ocean territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The Association provides an essential voice for over 1,200 elected members, some 14,500 Local Government employees, as well as over 2.6 million residents of Western Australia. WALGA also provides professional advice and services that provide benefits to Local Governments and the communities they serve.

Emerging Aviation Technologies and Local Government

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) makes this submission on the National Aviation Policy Issues Paper on Emerging Aviation Technologies on behalf of Local Government in Western Australia.

WALGA participates in the WA Drones Reference Group, chaired by the WA Department of Transport, which supports the Western Australian whole-of-government response.

This submission is intended to emphasise and illustrate issues relating to drones that have been raised by member councils.

WALGA recognises that the most likely future trends involve increased use of drones, in a more diverse range of applications. WALGA notes that the Australian Government is taking the leading role in regulating the use of drones, and considers this to be appropriate, given the Commonwealth's pre-existing role in regulating aviation.

Impact of Drone Operations

The Issues Paper specifically addresses noise and privacy which are matters of concern that have been raised by the WALGA membership without adequate resolution to date.

Residents and business have sought assistance from their Local Government to address the impacts of noise and privacy intrusion by drones. Local Governments do not have adequate regulatory tools and measures to respond to these complaints. It is noted that the Issues Paper addresses both of these issues, and in particular it notes that concerns around noise can be highly subjective and in part relate to the particular pitch of the noise created by drone operations, rather than the volume.

While regulation on noise impacts may be a State or Local Government responsibility, there is a need for research and national agreement regarding standards and conventions for drone noise and a process for certifying drones at the point of import or manufacture. Noise impacts should be considered for both commercial and recreational drone operations.

In ensuring that community concerns around intrusive noise and privacy, there are two key issues that WALGA recommend the Australian Government give particular attention:

- Effective enforcement; and
- Training for pilots in the appropriate use of drones.

Application of Drone Technologies

Local Governments are already significant users of commercial drone services in support a range of services including:

- Public infrastructure inspection (bridges, roofs, lighting towers, etc.)

- Management of natural areas (tree cover, ground cover, feral and native animals, flood areas, etc.)
- Regulation of off-road vehicles and illegal dumping
- Stockpile measurement (waste cell capacity and utilisation, basic raw materials including gravel and sand)
- Post disaster response (assessing flood damage to public infrastructure)

There are also a range of additional applications that are potentially contentious, including compliance inspection with planning and building approvals and other surveillance activities.

As noted, the willingness of the public to accept the impact of drones is likely linked to their understanding of its purpose. An example of this is the acceptance of drones for shark detection, despite an aversion to drones for recreational purposes being used on beaches. In considering approaches to regulating impacts of commercial drone operations it may be helpful to consider the purpose (public versus private benefit) for which the drone is being used.

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the National Aviation Policy Issues Paper on Emerging Aviation Technologies to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.