



Committee calls for new privacy protections as drone use surges

New privacy laws might be needed to protect against a wave of ‘eyes in the sky,’ according to a Federal Parliamentary Committee.

Australia’s drone industry is booming thanks to rapidly improving technology that has made drones cheaper, more capable and easier to operate. Even as drones are poised to revolutionise the farming, mining, science, media and other industries, they also pose a real threat to privacy. Drone safety has also become a prominent concern, with numerous injuries and near-misses reported across Australia.

The House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs says that Australia’s existing privacy laws do not protect Australians’ privacy from drones. The Committee’s new report [*Eyes in the sky: Inquiry into drones and the regulation of air safety and privacy*](#) calls on the Australian government to modernise and simplify Australia’s privacy laws to protect against potentially invasive new technologies like drones. Current plans to update airspace regulation will improve safety, but the Committee calls for frequent review of regulations to keep pace with the rapid development of drone technology.

The Committee’s report, tabled today in Parliament, draws on evidence from industry groups, privacy experts and government agencies heard at two roundtable discussions and a number of public hearings earlier this year. The report makes six recommendations, calling for:

- the Australian government to consider legislating for a tort of privacy, as proposed in the discussion paper of the Australian Law Reform Commission’s *Inquiry into Serious Invasions of Privacy in the Digital Era*
- modernised and nationally-uniform laws regulating the use of surveillance devices, including drones
- a review of the laws regulating police use of surveillance drones
- an education campaign to inform drone users about privacy and air safety laws
- improved consultation regarding the effectiveness of air safety laws, and
- future reviews of privacy and air safety laws to keep up with developments in technology.

Committee Chair Mr George Christensen MP said that the inquiry had revealed gaps in Australia’s privacy laws leaving Australians at risk. ‘Drones are coming – the technology is here and it is only a matter of time before they become widespread,’ Mr Christensen said. ‘Drones will revolutionise some industries, with a wide range of beneficial uses. All the same, we must set out clear rules that govern how the police, governments, businesses and members of the public use drones.’

The Committee’s report is available at [this link](#).

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