



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

DPS ref: D17/151427

Senator Glenn Sterle
Chair
Standing Committee on Rural and Regional
Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Sterle

I refer to your letter of 17 October 2017 seeking a response to questions regarding the use of drones in the precincts of Australian Parliament House (APH) to inform your inquiry into the regulatory requirements that impact on the use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, Unmanned Aerial Systems and associated system.

I am pleased to provide you with the following responses on behalf of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS).

Question 1

Has DPS been approached over the last twelve months (and specifically in June 2017) for approval to fly a drone in the vicinity of Parliament House including over the parliamentary sports ovals during a live rugby match involving parliamentarians?

If so, what process was undertaken in consultation with CASA and any other parties to consider the request and grant approval?

Response

DPS was not approached for approval to fly a drone for the specific case identified in June 2017. A request was received from the National Rugby League on 21 June 2017 to use the parliamentary sports oval but there was no associated request to fly a drone in the vicinity of Parliament House.

In the last 12 months DPS has been approached on a number of occasions for the use of drones. Only one has been approved by the Presiding Officers associated with the filming of the ABC documentary *The House With Annabel Crabb*.

With any such requests DPS first seeks advice from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to assist in identifying any issues or concerns.

On receipt of advice from the AFP, DPS informs the Presiding Officers and other key stakeholders at APH including the Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms. As noted above, only one request was approved in the last 12 months. The ABC requested and received approval from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) for the use of a drone in the parliamentary precinct to conduct filming for their documentary *The House With Annabel Crabb*.

Question 2

Was DPS approached specifically by Mr James Ashby or any other staff of the One Nation political party for approval to fly a drone in the vicinity of Parliament House in June 2017 or at any other time this year?

If so, what was the consultation process undertaken to consider the request?

Response

There is no record of Mr James Ashby, or any other staff member of the One Nation political party, requesting to fly a drone within the vicinity of Parliament House in June 2017 or at any other time during the calendar year.

Question 3

The committee was informed by CASA on 3 October 2017 that:

The airspace over or in the vicinity of Parliament House is not declared as a prohibited area because, in accordance with the regulation 6 of the Airspace Regulations, 'CASA must not declare an area to be a prohibited area unless...it is necessary for reason of military necessity to prohibit the flight of aircraft over the area'. Currently there is no prohibited airspace declared in any airspace under Australian jurisdiction and no authoritative evidence has been submitted to CASA warranting the declaration of the airspace over or in the vicinity of Parliament House as a prohibited area.

In light of the heightened attention given to security at Parliament House, has DPS given any consideration to the risks involving drones flown over and around Parliament House and methods to mitigate them?

In particular, does DPS consider that a prohibition on the use of drones over and around the building would strengthen the security of the building and provide additional safety for its occupants?

Response

DPS has given consideration to the risks involved in flying drones over, and around, APH and given thought to methods for mitigating such risks. This issue is currently under consideration by the Security Management Board and legal advice is currently being sought on the existing legislative and regulatory framework covering the security arrangements within the parliamentary precinct, including options available for imposing restrictions on the use of remotely-piloted aircraft.

The advancing capability and accessibility of commercial grade drones is of concern and could pose additional risks to the security of the building and safety of its occupants. The ability to prohibit use of such drones over and around the building should be considered before that capability arrives. Only CASA has the authority to declare prohibited airspace.

Yours sincerely

Rob Stefanic
Secretary

26 October 2017