

# UK CONSULTATION ON SAFE USE OF DRONES TAKES OFF

The UK Government plans to introduce new measures on the safe use of drones to be matched by strong safeguards to protect the public, following its rollout of a consultation process at the end of last year, which will also consider whether there is a need for a new criminal offence for misuse of drones. Report by Jim Lee\*.



**T**he government is determined to make the most of this emerging technology, estimated to be worth around £102 billion (around €119.8 billion) by 2025. But ministers are clear it will only be a success if it is done safely, and with the consent of the public.

The UK's Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (in a written statement to Parliament) said: "The government's industrial strategy will support our ambition for Britain to become the global go-to place for scientists, innovators and tech investors, and the development of new technologies such as drones is key to that.

"We are already well-placed: alongside the government's support for trials and projects, the Civil Aviation Authority has granted over 2,000 commercial drone operator permissions. But we want to further drive forward progress in the UK drones industry by fostering the right supportive environment.

"In the UK, drones are already being used by the police, fire services and search and rescue in emergency situations, by energy, road and rail providers to inspect and maintain our key infrastructure, and by conservation organisations to monitor natural environments.

"Drones are saving time and money, improving delivery of services in these areas, improving safety and even helping to save lives. As the technology develops, we will see drones being used in other fields to achieve similar results. There are also many leisure users of drones, who must follow the strict laws in



place, such as keeping their drone within their sight. With the photographic and videography opportunities drones present, sales of drones to this audience are increasing at pace.

"But like many other technologies, drones can also be misused and challenge safety, security and privacy. Whilst the vast majority of drone users are law-abiding and have good intentions, it is likely that some are not aware of the rules that apply and inadvertently break them, risking safety, privacy and security. It also cannot be ignored that there will be some who will purposefully break the laws on drones, and potentially use drones to cause harm."

**AT THE CUTTING EDGE**

“The government’s vision is for a society and economy in the UK where drones are safely and properly used in ways that improve the delivery of public and commercial services, where all leisure drone users are aware of the rules and adhere to them. And where flourishing drone service businesses are contributing to the UK economy, creating jobs and encouraging the development of important new skills in the UK.

“We want to create the right conditions for new uses of drone technology to emerge and grow, placing the UK at the cutting edge of new technologies and capture a significant portion of the global drone applications market. We will not do so unless we take the safety, security and privacy challenges and our duties to the general public extremely seriously.

“This consultation sets out some of the next steps under consideration for doing so. These proposals aim to keep pace with this fast emerging market, balancing the challenges appropriately without restricting the opportunity drones present.

“They are intended to ensure the global competitiveness of the UK as a home for innovation and technological investment while providing the assurance the public need. As the technology and market opportunities develop, we want to proactively address these challenges, and support the growing and changing UK drones services industry”.

**AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

Tim Johnson, Policy Director at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) added: “Our priority is the safe operation of drones, and we cannot underestimate the importance of understanding how to use drones safely and responsibly. The new CAA Dronecode, which forms part of our wider drone awareness campaign, is designed to help protect the safety of the wider aviation industry.

“Drones have significant potential to drive benefits across a range of sectors, from farming to emergency response, healthcare to logistics. We encourage anyone with an interest in this area to respond to the government’s consultation.” He added that the CAA’s safety code and dronesafe website, and the recently released NATS safety app for drone users ‘Drone assist’ are important tools in encouraging safe and legal drone use.

Andrew Sage, RPAS Director at air traffic controller NATS said: “NATS fully supports the development of the drone industry and is committed to creating a safe and efficient airspace environment that meets the needs of both manned and unmanned aircraft operators.”

**15 MARCH DEADLINE DATE**

NATS is encouraging all users of the UK’s airspace to respond to the consultation. Sage said that “it’s only by understanding all perspectives and working together that we’ll be able to find the solutions that will see successful manned and unmanned aviation industries both safely operating in the UK”.

The consultation contains the following documents:

- Unlocking the high-tech economy: consultation on the safe use of drones in the UK;
- Impact assessment: insurance for drones;
- Impact assessment: mandated guidance provision for drones;
- Impact assessment: registration requirements for drones.

**PROPOSED NEW MEASURES**

- Mandatory registration of new drones;
- Tougher penalties for illegal flying near no-fly zones and new signs for no-fly zones at sensitive sites such as airports and prisons;
- Making drones electronically identifiable so the owner’s details can be passed to police if they are spotted breaking the law.



The deadline for responding to the consultation is 15 March. The Government is encouraging both commercial and leisure drone operators, the aviation industry, drone manufacturers and other companies involved in the drone market to respond before this date.

In addition, it is also requesting other interested parties to respond such as model aircraft associations and their members, the insurance industry, members of the public and relevant NGOs, higher education institutions and research and development institutions, local authorities, and members of both Houses.

This article appears courtesy of [www.FlyinginIreland.com](http://www.FlyinginIreland.com)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR – JIM LEE (RIP)\***

‘Emergency Services Ireland’ would like to pass on our condolences to the family of the late Jim Lee, who died suddenly in early January.

A key contributor to Flying in Ireland since its inception over 10 years ago, Jim Lee had a life-long interest in military matters and aviation. He fused both of these interests together with a passion for military aviation, initially as a photographer. He travelled extensively over the years and had been the guest of many European air forces, plus the air forces of the United States, Russia and others throughout the world.

His first introduction to journalism coincided with an interest in the civil aviation industry when he initially wrote for and later edited, ‘Aviation Ireland’, the club magazine of the Aviation Society of Ireland.

He also contributed items for other aviation magazines and produced a number of detailed contributions to Government policy documents, most recently the Irish Government’s White Paper on Defence. Jim was also deeply involved in the local community and voluntary sector and has worked both in local government and central government.

