



CASA ISSUES WARNING ON DRONES IN BUSHFIRE AREAS

News / Airlines



Operators of remotely piloted aircraft have been warned to stay away from **bushfire** areas or they could face fines of up to \$9,000 and potentially even criminal prosecution, Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority (**CASA**) says.

The warning comes as fire fighters prepare for the upcoming bushfire season and as the nation approaches another hot summer.

CASA says there are "countless" instances where remotely piloted aircraft, more commonly known as **drones**, posed a real safety risk to firefighting aircraft and bush firefighters.

"Drones flown in bushfires could collide with firefighting aircraft or hit firefighters on the ground," CASA said in a statement.

"A collision between a drone and a firefighting aeroplane or helicopter could lead to a catastrophic accident.

"Bushfires – 'If you fly, they can't'."

CASA said flying drones near bushfires could cause aerial firefighting to be suspended until the drone was located and removed in order to avoid possible mid-air collisions with an aircraft. This could put people on the ground at extra risk.

The Authority said it was working with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre to raise awareness of the dangers of having drones near bushfire-affected areas.

“If a drone is seen in the vicinity of a bushfire and is believed to have put aircraft or firefighters at risk the Civil Aviation Safety Authority can investigate. If a breach of the safety rules is identified a fine can be issued.

“In serious cases individuals may be referred for consideration of criminal prosecution, which may lead to a court imposing higher financial penalties.”

Meanwhile, CASA was seeking public comment on some proposed new rules for passenger flights.

Among the proposals is to have charter flights come under the same safety standards as regular public transport (RPT) services, which CASA said would result in “improved safety standards in some areas of operations for non-scheduled flights which are currently classified as charter”.

CASA said the proposed rules would apply to passenger and cargo operations in aircraft fitted with more than nine passenger seats or with a maximum take-off weight of more than 8,618 kilograms. Many of the proposed changes would formalise current practices, while others would simplify compliance.

The proposed new rules followed comprehensive consultation with airlines, smaller air operators, aviation industry representative groups and pilot and cabin crew unions, CASA said.

“Other key changes include provisions for the use of new technology such as synthetic vision and enhanced vision systems, requirements for underwater locating devices on some flights, requirements for additional medical equipment on aircraft, restrictions on rostering inexperienced flight crew and new training and checking requirements for cabin crew,” CASA said in a statement.

“Other changes proposed include new terminology and rules for extended diversion time operations, clearer rules for operations on narrow runways, simplified equipment regulations, new datalink recording requirements, options for more flexible pilot training and checking programs, simplified pilot recency requirements, formalising a cabin crew to passenger seat ratio of one to fifty and new recency requirements for cabin crew.

“The proposed new rules – to be contained in Part 121 of the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations – align to the maximum extent possible with International Civil Aviation Organization standards and recommended practices.”

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