Remote Piloted Aircraft (Drones) Policy and Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') recognises the value, applications and potential for innovation of remote piloted aircraft (RPA), colloquially referred to as "drones," in various environments including technical, educational and artistic purposes. CDU is committed to supporting the applications of RPAs within the legislative requirements of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and associated Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 NT requirements.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This document sets out the principles by which CDU employs RPAs and the procedure by which pilots or other people involved in the use of RPAs may employ RPAs within and on behalf of CDU.

(3) This document does not provide comprehensive details on the operation of RPAs or the specific requirements of remote pilots and other people involved in the use of RPAs. These details are provided in CDU's RPA Operations Manual (the Operations Manual).

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This policy and procedure applies to all RPA operations within CDU campuses and property, and to all RPA operations carried out by or on behalf of the University, including operations carried out by students, staff, visitors and third-party contractors.

Section 4 - Policy

(5) CDU holds a Remotely Piloted Aircraft Operations Certificate (ReOC), which allows the University to trade as an RPA service provider and permits the University to authorise RPA operations within the bounds of CASA regulations.

(6) Specific processes and conditions regarding remote pilot licence (RePL) training and licencing are not covered in this document and can be found in the Operations Manual.

(7) All RPA operations undertaken within University grounds or on behalf of the University, such as research or fieldwork conducted outside CDU grounds, and including recreational use of RPAs, must have prior approval from the University as a ReOC holder.

(8) The Chief Remote Pilot of CDU is responsible for ensuring that all CDU and CDU-approved RPA operations are in accordance with CASA and other legislative requirements. They are responsible for maintaining and updating the Operations Manual, which provides comprehensive information on undertaking RPA operations safely and in accordance with all relevant legislation and regulations.

This policy document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or parts thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of staff printing this document to always refer to the Governance Document Library for the latest version.

(9) CDU recognises that RPAs fall under the authority of CASA and associated legislation and regulation, including the:

a. Civil Aviation Act 1988 (Cth);
b. Civil Aviation Regulations 1988 (Cth);
c. Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998 (Cth); and
d. Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).

(10) CDU recognises and works to minimise the risks presented by RPAs, including to aviation, WHS and privacy. In particular, the University will work to ensure that CDU RPA operations present no risk or threat to conventional air traffic, particularly that of the Darwin International Airport.

(11) CASA and the Australian Safety Transport Bureau have strict regulations that apply to RPA operators. The University has an obligation to maintain the safety of students, staff, visitors and contractors and comply with legislation, regulation and rulings of the relevant regulators.

Section 5 - Procedure

Responsibilities

(12) Managers and supervisors responsible for RPA operations or activities involving RPA operations must ensure that staff, students and contractors are aware of their responsibilities under CASA and the Operations Manual when using RPAs for the University.

(13) RPA pilots are part of the aviation industry and have responsibilities under CASA regulations. RPA pilots at the University must operate within the requirements of the Operations Manual, relevant government legislative requirements and all relevant University policies and procedures.

(14) RPA pilots must ensure that the safety and privacy of others is taken into consideration during RPA operations.

Requirements

(15) The Operations Manual provides the minimum levels of training for the respective types of RPA. Confirmation of training is a mandatory requirement prior to being granted authorisation from the Chief Remote Pilot to operate RPAs for any purpose under the auspices of the University.

(16) Remote Pilots or any other person involved in the operations of RPAs are required to consider their fitness for duty prior to undertaking any duty under the authority of this ReOC, including but not limited to the following:

a. general physical wellbeing;
b. adequate rest;
c. drug or alcohol use;
d. adverse effects of medication; and
e. stress and mental wellbeing.

(17) All RPA operators working under the authority of the CDU ReOC must be inducted by the Chief Remote Pilot and must hold a valid RePL issued by CASA for the type and rating of RPA being operated, unless the vehicle weighs less than two kilograms.

(18) RPAs under two kilograms fall within the CASA “excluded” category and do not require that the operator hold a RePL. However, operators using an excluded RPA for work or study must obtain an Aviation Reference Number and Operator Registration from CASA, abide by CASA rules and regulations, and seek authorisation from CDU.

Approval procedure

(19) All CDU RPA operations must be approved by the Chief Remote Pilot. It is strongly recommended that University staff and students intending to undertake RPA operations seek advice from the Chief Remote Pilot as early as possible, as operations may require permission and authorisations from a range of authorities outside the University.

(20) All non-excluded RPA Operation requests must first be submitted to the Chief Remote Pilot. The application must include all relevant documentation as detailed in the Operations Manual, and include all risk assessments, flight plans and database entries necessary for review and approval. Risk assessments must outline:

a. the activity to be undertaken;
b. any risks that may impact on the operation;
c. any risks that the operation may create;
d. control measures to mitigate identified risks and hazards; and
e. any other information required by the Operations Manual.

(21) RPA operations outside CDU property, such as remote fieldwork, must be approved by the relevant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor or Head of Institute in addition to the Chief Remote Pilot.

(22) Permission to fly in a restricted/prohibited area is to be obtained from the authority controlling the area. In these instances, consultation with the Chief Remote Pilot is mandatory to ensure compliance with CASA and other regulatory requirements.

(23) Approval requests for all normal operations must be submitted at least five working days prior to the proposed RPA operation.

(24) All special operations will require a minimum of eight weeks for approval. This allows for exemptions to be issued by CASA, ensuring appropriate documentation and training is in place, and updating and maintaining RPAs as required.

(25) Completed risk assessments, licences, and insurance details for commercial RPA are to be sent to the Manager of Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) prior to approval by the Chief Remote Pilot for review and approval.

(26) The Chief Remote Pilot will review the flight plan and assess the risks for the proposed RPA operation. The Chief Remote Pilot may require further information or:

a. additional information or identification of risks prior to approval;
b. additional required steps to be undertaken prior to, or during the mission; and
c. additional requirements on the operation such as, but not limited to:
    i. phone calls to controlling authorities;
    ii. radio broadcasts;
    iii. flight parameter requirements;
    iv. flight path requirements; and
    v. crew requirements.

(27) Once the Chief Remote Pilot is satisfied that the operation has met all appropriate requirements and has a suitable risk management plan, they may approve the operation.

(28) All RPAs used in University RPA Operations by University staff and students must be:

a. owned by the University;

b. listed in the University RPA database and register; and
c. noted on the University insurance policy.

(29) Non-University owned RPAs may not be used for CDU RPA Operations unless specifically approved by the Chief Remote Pilot prior to the operation.

(30) University staff and students must complete the Planning Checklist for use of RPAs, as provided in the Operations Manual, before carrying out an RPA Operation.

Flying commercially under 2 kg

(31) University personnel seeking to fly RPAs weighing less than two kilograms must comply with the Standard Operating Conditions of Excluded Category operations as defined in the Operations Manual and within the limitations of the notification to CASA, i.e., location and RPA type (Multi-rotor, fixed wing etc).

(32) To ensure compliance with up-to-date CASA regulations, check the CASA website. CASA regulations in regard to RPAs weighing less than 2kg are as follows:

a. notify CASA five business days before flying using an aviation reference number;
b. an RPA's operators certificate (ReOC) is not required;
c. only fly the aircraft in the operator's line of sight, in daylight, without any obstacles between the operator and the RPA, and avoid flying through cloud, smoke, or fog;
d. do not fly the RPA to an altitude exceeding 120m or 400ft;
e. fly the RPA at least 30m away from other people, not within the vicinity of prohibited/restricted areas and not in areas where failure could cause harm to property or people on the ground;
f. do not fly the RPA over or near an area affecting public safety or where an emergency operation is underway e.g. Search and rescue, police operations, firefighting efforts and traffic accidents;
g. fly only one RPA at a time;
h. do not operate on aircraft approach or departure paths or the movement area. Do not create a hazard to aircraft within a 3nm (5.5km) radius of an uncontrolled aerodrome or helicopter landing site; and
i. do not operate the RPA closer than 5.5km to a controlled airport.

Flying commercially Over 2 kg

(33) CASA regulations in regard to RPAs weighing more than 2kg require an RPA's operators certificate (ReOC) and a remote pilot licence (RePL).

Non-university remote pilot operators, remote pilots-in-command and university property

(34) Non-University Remote Pilot Operators must not operate on behalf of the University or operate as Remote Pilot Operators for any University owned RPAs without the prior written approval from the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor or Associate Dean Research and the Chief Remote Pilot. For more details contact the CDU Chief Remote Pilot.

Private or recreational operations using University RPAs

(35) RPAs that are not owned by the University must not be used over University Premises for any reason under any circumstances by University staff, students, or visitors.

(36) These RPAs will not come under University RPA Insurance Policy.

Privacy requirements

(37) Under the Privacy Act 1988, any footage taken from an RPA must not identify an individual without their prior consent.

Insurance

(38) All Remote Pilot Operators must be approved by the insurer and listed on CDU's Remotely Piloted Aircraft System insurance policy before they can undertake any University authorised RPA operation.

(39) All RPAs and associated equipment operated by the Remote Pilot Operator or Remote Pilot-In-Command must be approved by the insurer and listed on University's Remotely Piloted Aircraft System insurance policy before they can be flown.

(40) Insurance cover is not automatic and will require the Remote Pilot Operator or Remote Pilot-In-Command to contact the Chief Remote Pilot and University Treasury to arrange cover. Insurance cover is only in place once confirmation has been received from the insurer.

(41) If a claim is made on University Remotely Piloted Aircraft System insurance policy as a result of a University RPA Operation, an excess may apply. Any excess will be the responsibility of the owner of the RPA.

Incident reporting

(42) In the event of any incident, the Remote Pilot Operator or other support personnel, such as the Spotter/Observer, are to report the incident by contacting:

a. 000 if anyone is injured and requires emergency treatment;
b. Local air traffic controllers;
c. The Chief Remote Pilot;
d. The Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor or Associate Dean Research;
e. HSE Manager; and
f. Any additional parties identified during the Pre-Flight Risk Assessment;

(43) The Remote Pilot Operator or other support personnel must also:

a. document and photograph all aspects of the incident immediately and on location and report the incident using the HSE Accident, Incident or Injury Report Form in accordance with University Incident and Investigation procedure;
b. assist with the investigation of the incident if required, ensuring processes and documentation are amended to incorporate recommendations; and
c. implement all corrective actions from the investigation to minimise the opportunity for any repeat of similar incidents.

(44) Managers and supervisors must ensure complaints regarding alleged breaches of CASA requirements or the Operations Manual are dealt with quickly and effectively at the lowest possible level.

Section 6 - Non-Compliance

(45) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct – Staff or the Code of Conduct – Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin

University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct – Students.

(46) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Code of Conduct – Staff and Code of Conduct - Students.

(47) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection +61 8 89466890
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