

Submission 46 – Dr Adam Lewis

I am strongly opposed to the presumption that drones are an acceptable or effective approach to delivery or are suitable for general use rather than specialist situations.

Drones have the potential to be environmentally destructive, creating noise that will disturb people and wildlife (adding to the pressures from traffic noise, light pollution, etc); they will create increased packaging waste, and they use an inherently energy-intensive process - flying.

The economic proposition behind drones in this context seems to be that people will pay for instantaneous gratification (e.g. pizza deliveries), and that a drone (even a noise and energy - hungry one) will cost less than a delivery-rider. Their role is likely to be limited to small, frequent tasks rather than large jobs - drones are not going to be delivering 20kg boxes of groceries for people who can't drive (or if they do, at that scale they will be will be massive, noisy, and very dangerous). The path is also a downward slope; once established, the next step for the drone-delivery-lobby will be to demand that inconvenient obstacles (trees and vegetation), be controlled or removed ('in the interests of public safety'), further degrading urban environments.

Fundamentally, drones could be highly invasive the use of "delivery drones" therefore needs to be regulated according to socially acceptable norms and in the context of sustainable urban development plans, and not permitted to develop according to business models that ignore inconvenient externalities (including unemployed people).

So far, this sounds like a BAD idea, fundamentally reactive and naively responding to the glitz of google and 'new technology', rather than investing in informed consideration. Some analysis is needed of the situations in which drone networks make environmental (including energy use) and social sense, combined with an knowledge of the social expectations (that is, plans) for sustainable development of suburbs in order to determine where Australians (not google) want drones 'to go'. (Personally, I quite like the sound of a delivery rider's bike going by at night, but I would be incensed by a drone.) Use-cases that put purpose ahead of profit, such as delivery of prescription medicines, might be a good start. Calling in some local expertise such as the Australian Centre for Field Robotics might also be helpful.