

Australian Certified UAS Operators



By Joe Urli, ACUO President

Australian Commercial UAS Operations

Started in May 2009, the Australian Certified UAV Operators Inc. (ACUO) was registered as a not for profit association on March 30th, 2010.

The 7 founding members of ACUO management committee are all civilian certified UAV operators, approved by the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) for commercial UAV operations in the national airspace.

The vision and core values of the association define the way in which its members will build integrity and earn respect for ACUO to become the responsible administrative authority for commercial unmanned aviation in Australia. One that will foster, encourage and develop commercial unmanned aviation safely, effectively and with minimum cost.

Full membership of the association is open to all civilian certified UAS Operators and an associate membership is open to appropriately certified UAS Controllers or UAS Maintainers from civilian and military backgrounds.

The association also supports industry membership for those organizations or businesses associated with the commercial unmanned aviation sector. (ie. Regulatory authorities, UAS manufacturers, Insurers etc)

The website at www.acuo.org.au will be expanded in coming months, providing links to ACUO approved source material relevant to commercial UAS and operations and as a portal for industry & businesses to identify and find legitimate commercial UAS service providers. A members section will be devoted to UAS standards & regulatory discussion, development, and news.

Light UAS Activity in Australia

Australian certified UAS operators currently all use UAS defined in the CASR 1998 regulations as 'small' UAS (< 150kgs). There are 6 different types of UAS being deployed in commercial operation with the majority under 15kg.

Four examples of ACUO members UAS activity highlights the diversity of UAS types and applications in Australia.

'Airship Solutions' is a manufacturer and operator of unmanned airships with more than 300 airships sold in over 30 countries. Airship Solutions is unique in being the only certified operator of unmanned airships in Australia, primarily for advertising, photography and videography. 'Airship Solutions' UAS are prominent at product launches and major sporting and cultural events but are also finding a niche in cost-effective military and scientific studies.

'Aerial Photography Specialists' (APS) is a certified operator of quadrotor UAS. The focus for APS has been working with power transmission utilities, local government councils, state government agencies and other large organizations, particularly in the service of close proximity aerial asset inspections using reliable Microdrone UAS platform.

'UAV Systems' is a certified UAS operator delivering specialised UAS services including aerial photography & video, UAS maintenance, industry consultation and safety audit / inspection services.

'VTOL Aerospace' is a certified UAS operator that strives to be a leader in spatial information applications that are affordable, useful and readily available to all - at any time and in any place.

The application of our vision is seen through our concept of 'Earth Observation', a representation of the built and natural environment in three dimensions. V-TOL Aerospace is a 'complete' service provider offering UAS flight services, training, and research and development.

Ongoing UAS Developments

A CASA review of the national UAS regulations, begun in 2009, was the trigger for several new developments to consolidate the UAS industry in Australia, including a public awareness campaign initiated between CASA and the national recreational aviation authority (MAAA) and the recent appointment of a dedicated UAS coordinator within the Safety Oversight Branch of CASA Operations.

The CASA review is also timely in that Australia has seen a significant increase in the level of unauthorized and illegal UAS R&D activity in the last 12 months. Left unchecked, this will pose a serious public safety risk and threaten the whole integrity of the UAS industry.

The nucleus of this activity has been the recent advances in technology that now makes UAS components such as flight-control systems, wireless communications and miniature HD cameras affordable at a hobby level.

The downside is the lack of safety and restraint so far demonstrated by hobbyists and highlights the massive task of providing regulatory guidance, safety oversight and effective administrative authority for unmanned aviation activity deemed non-recreational use.

International Coordination

It is imperative that aviation authorities internationally, clearly define recreational, educational, R&D and commercial UAS activity, so that aviation and public safety is not diminished, that recreational aviation is not unfairly disadvantaged, and legitimate commercial UAS operators are not unduly burdened by regulation and cost.

Australia took a progressive regulatory lead 8 years ago and the appointment of an Australian aviation official to co-chair the latest ICAO UAS Study Group says a lot for the maturity of CASA in being able to provide the necessary experience and guidance on a sound framework for UAS regulations.

It is vital that international coordination continues to explore all options for the safe amalgamation of manned and unmanned aviation.

"Strength through Unity"

Joe Urli
President
Australian Certified UAS
Operators

