



# HOUSE OF LORDS

European Union Committee

House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

Tel: 020 7219 6083  
Fax: 020 7219 6715  
euclords@parliament.uk  
www.parliament.uk/lords

Robert Goodwill MP  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

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Dear Robert

## **Government Response to Civil Use of Drones in the EU**

Thank you for your *response to the Committee's report* of 26 March 2015, which was considered by the EU Select Committee at its meeting on 6 July 2015.

It is gratifying to note that on a number of important and key issues, the Government shares the view of the Committee. In particular, the Committee welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to actively contribute to the development of harmonised safety rules for RPAS across the EU. The Government's support for a proportionate and risk-based approach to these regulations is essential to ensure that SMEs are not overburdened by future regulations. We would like to know what assessment have you made regarding the Commission's plans to introduce legislation extending the remit of EASA to include RPAS weighing less than 150kg before the end of the year?

Despite this general consensus, there are a number of points upon which we would like to request further information.

In relation to the regulatory framework, the response agrees that industry should be granted more access to JARUS, the body nominated with drafting the safety regulations for Europe. However, this is dependent upon "industry's willingness to provide sufficient resource into JARUS". Over the course of the inquiry and more recently at a stakeholder event discussing the report, industry representatives told the Committee that participation in bodies such as JARUS required extensive travel which was prohibitively expensive. What steps is the Government taking to support SMEs who wish to participate more with JARUS?

The response also highlights the action that you intended to take to establish an effective governance structure over JARUS, ensuring that it delivers draft regulations in good time. How have these plans progressed since March? Can you be specific about key outputs against which the Government intends to evaluate JARUS' progress over the coming year?

The Committee also recommended that national aviation authorities, such as the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the UK, provide more resources to JARUS. On the other hand,

we learnt over the course of the inquiry that while the CAA was positively received by a wide group of stakeholders, there were substantial concerns about its own resources. What steps is the Government taking to balance these competing demands for resources? Moreover, as the workload of the CAA is only expected to increase, what steps is the Government taking to ensure that the CAA is adequately resourced to monitor the safety of RPAS operations and to support SMEs entering the industry in the UK.

We were also interested to learn about the Government's new ATI competition, which will fund R&D projects for RPAS in the UK over the coming years. We are pleased to note that the Government is continuing to invest in the key technologies needed to support the RPAS industry in the future. Could you describe how this new project differs from the successful ASTRAEA programme and how it builds ASTRAEA's findings?

Many SMEs told the Committee about the challenges they faced in accessing EU level funding for R&D. What steps is the Government taking to support SMEs access to R&D funding through the ATI competition and EU level programmes?

In chapter 7 of the report, the Committee recommended that national aviation authorities be required to "share statistics regarding RPAS incidents with regulators, insurers and operators in other Member States" to improve the information used by insurers to assess the risks of different RPAS operations. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that the CAA complies with this recommendation?

In closing, we would like to congratulate the Government on its proactive approach to working with NASA on RPAS related issues and in particular, the creation of an online database to track and identify small RPAS flying below 500ft. On this point we wanted to ask whether you are engaging with industry on the development of an online database or app that would enable RPAS to be tracked and identified. What is your assessment of the progress that has been made towards this goal?

At the time of writing, a date for the report to be debated in the House is yet to be confirmed. Nonetheless, we would appreciate being kept abreast of your plans for a public consultation on RPAS, which we understand is scheduled to take place in the autumn. The Committee is grateful for the support that it received from your department throughout the inquiry and your continued support in assisting the Committee with its follow-up.

We look forward to a reply to this letter before the summer recess.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Commons European Scrutiny Committee; the Clerk of the Commons European Scrutiny Committee; Les Saunders, Cabinet Office; and Margaret Browne, Departmental Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Tim Boswell*

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Chairman of the European Union Committee