

Flying Drones in National Parks State by State Breakdown

Australian Capital Territory

In the ACT, drone pilots must follow both Australia's national drone rules, and any additional guidelines set by the ACT Government. Although drones are commonly used for purposes such as search and rescue, photography, and research, their recreational use can negatively impact wildlife, as well as the privacy and enjoyment of visitors in public spaces. Additionally, drones pose safety risks, particularly due to their lithium batteries, which can ignite fires in crashes, and their interference with emergency management operations like helicopter rescues.

In the ACT, flying drones is strictly prohibited in all reserves governed by the Nature Conservation Act 2014. However, exceptions may be made for specific purposes, such as conservation research, through the granting of a nature conservation licence. Conservation officers are also permitted to use drones for park management in restricted areas. In all instances, drone pilots must adhere to CASA rules and any licence conditions that apply. Outside of nature reserves, CASA regulations govern drone use in public areas.

Website: [Parks ACT](#)

New South Wales

To operate a drone in a national park or reserve managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), you must obtain approval. The NPWS "Drones in Parks" policy outlines the requirements for drone use and how to apply for approval. Commercial drone operations, such as filming and photography, also require approval and must comply with the NPWS Filming and Photography Policy. Before flying, drone users should contact the relevant NPWS park office to request approval and check the park's webpage for alerts about incidents like fires that may restrict drone activity. Additionally, all drone operators must follow Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) drone safety rules.

Once you have approval, you are only permitted to fly in the designated areas specified. You must carry your approval with you, either in paper or electronic form, and cease operations if emergency or bushfire activities occur. When flying, maintain a distance of at least 100 meters from marine mammals, keep 30 meters away from people, and always have your drone within your line of sight. Drones should not exceed 120 meters in altitude, and you must stay at least 5.5 kilometres away from controlled aerodromes. Following CASA safety rules is mandatory to ensure the safe and responsible operation of drones within the park.

Website: [NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

Policy: [Drones In Parks Policy](#)

Approval Request: [Application Form](#)

Northern Territory

In the Northern Territory, flying drones in parks and reserves is permitted under specific rules to ensure the safety of park visitors, wildlife, and park operations. Drone users may need a permit, depending on the location and activity. Operators must not disturb park visitors, interfere with wildlife, or disrupt park management. Drones should always be flown within the line-of-sight during daylight hours, and national flying rules set by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) must be followed.

Additional restrictions include maintaining a 200-meter distance from waterholes, campgrounds, picnic areas, and park facilities like staff houses and offices, while they are in use. In other areas, drones must stay at least 30 meters away from people, animals, vehicles, boats, or buildings and should not fly higher than 120 meters above ground. Drones are prohibited within 5.5 kilometres of airports or helicopter landing sites and cannot be flown during emergency operations. If recording or photographing people, their consent is required. Park staff have the authority to ask drone pilots to stop flying, and failure to comply may result in a fine.

Website: [Parks and Reserves NT](#)

Policy: [Rules for flying drones in parks](#)

Information Sheet: [Flying our Drone Information Sheet](#)

Queensland

If you're a commercial filmmaker or photographer wishing to operate in a Queensland national park, conservation park, recreation area, or state forest, a Commercial Activity Permit (CAP) is required if the activity involves 11 or more people or the use of prescribed structures. However, for smaller activities with up to 10 people and no structures, a CAP is not needed. Regardless of whether a permit is required, all filmmakers and photographers must submit an online filming and photography notification at least 14 days prior to entering any Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) managed area. This ensures local rangers are informed for emergency situations and protects culturally sensitive areas managed by First Nations Peoples.

If your activity includes prescribed structures like towers, platforms, or drones over 2kg, a CAP is mandatory, and you must adhere to specific regulations. Public liability insurance of \$20 million is also required for all permit holders. Before applying, it's recommended to check park alerts for closures and schedule a pre-lodgement meeting to discuss your proposal. Fees apply for permits based on the number of people involved and the equipment used. The CAP application and daily permit fees vary depending on the scale of the operation and permits for operations exceeding three months require quarterly returns.

Website: [Parks and Forests QLD](#)

Policy: [Drone Safety and Regulation](#)

South Australia

In South Australia, flying drones (remotely piloted aircraft) in national parks, conservation parks, game reserves, recreation parks, regional reserves, and restricted access zones of marine parks is prohibited without a permit. Permits are only issued for scientific research or commercial filming and photography. For scientific research, drone use must be included in the research permit application, and for commercial purposes, it must be part of the filming or photography permit application. Additionally, restrictions apply when flying drones near marine mammals, including whales, to minimize disturbance.

Aircraft are also not permitted to land or take off within national parks or reserves, and there are minimum flight height restrictions over sensitive areas to protect wildlife and the visitor experience. Low-flying aircraft can disrupt breeding and resting animals and detract from the wilderness experience. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority has established Fly Neighbourly Advice (FNA) guidelines for certain areas, detailing minimum flight heights and offset distances, which all pilots must follow. Key locations with FNAs include Head of the Bight, Kangaroo Island, Dhilba Guuranda-Innes National Park, Waitpinga Cliffs, and Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre National Park. Emergency services may be exempt from these rules.

Website: [Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

Know Before You Go: [Drones in Parks](#)

Tasmania

The use of drones, or Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), is prohibited for park visitors on reserved land, including national parks in Tasmania. While these scenic locations may appear ideal for drone use, the National Parks and Reserved Land Regulations 2019 govern drone operations to prevent negative impacts such as disturbing wildlife, particularly breeding patterns of birds like eagles and shorebirds, disrupting visitor experiences, and posing safety risks by interfering with helicopter operations and fire management. Drone use in these areas must also comply with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) regulations.

Exceptions to the drone ban may be made for commercial filming, events, and scientific research conducted by accredited research organizations, provided operators are certified and licensed by CASA. Applications for these purposes can be submitted online, and more detailed information, including a map outlining restricted areas, is available on the Managing our Parks and Reserves webpage. For more information on applying for drone use, operators can visit the Commercial Filming page and access the online authorization form.

Website: [Parks TAS](#)

Licence: [Commercial Filming and Photography Licence](#)

Licence Application Form: [Here](#)

Know Before You Go: [Use of Drones On Reserve Land](#)

Victoria

Recreational drone use is prohibited on Parks Victoria managed land to avoid disturbing wildlife and other visitors, and those who violate this rule may face fines. For commercial filming involving drones, a permit is required. To obtain this permit, drone operators must provide supporting documents, including certification from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), specifically a Remote Pilot License (RePL) and a Remotely Piloted Aircraft Operator's Certificate (ReOC), even for drones under 2kg. Applications for drone use must be submitted at least 20 business days in advance to allow for processing, and late submissions are not accepted due to high application volumes.

To apply for a drone filming permit, applicants need to complete the online Filming and Photography (including RPA/Drone) application form, attach the necessary documents, and submit the form. Supporting documents include a \$20 million public liability insurance Certificate of Currency with aviation coverage, an Aircraft Operations Map, and a Job Safety Analysis (JSA). It's important to note that submitting an application doesn't guarantee approval, and permits do not grant exclusive access to park areas, so public access must not be restricted during filming.

Website: [Parks Victoria](#)

Drone Filming and Photography Permit application guidelines: [HERE](#)

Filming and Photography Application: [HERE](#)

Western Australia

In Western Australia, visitors can fly drones recreationally in national parks and conservation reserves without departmental approval, provided they adhere to specific rules. Drone users must comply with Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) regulations, including maintaining a 30-meter distance from people and avoiding flights directly over them. Additionally, all state laws such as the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 and the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 must be followed. Drones should not disturb wildlife, with a 60-meter separation distance required from marine species like whales and dolphins. Respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage is also necessary, and drones must not interfere with emergency operations like bushfire management.

For recreational drone use, it's recommended to contact the relevant district office before each flight to avoid disruption to park management activities. In the Swan and Canning Riverpark, a permit is required from the Rivers and Estuaries Branch. Commercial drone use, such as for profit or reward, requires a separate filming and photography permit or licence. For more information on commercial drone use, the department's Commercial Filming guidelines provide additional details.

Website: [Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

Western Australian Government: [Commercial Filming](#)

Western Australian Government: [Application Form](#)

Western Australian Government: [Guide To Application Form](#)