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20 April 2026

Commissioner Mal Lanyon
NSW Police Commissioner
Locked Bag 5102
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

By email: legpol@police.nsw.gov.au

Dear Commissioner Lanyon,

DRONE PILOT IN MOREE

The Law Society is aware of NSW Police's recent launch of a six-month drone trial in Moree. We understand the need for NSW Police to consider how new and emerging technologies might assist police operations to be safer, targeted and more effective.

The Law Society is also aware that there are some reasonable community concerns in respect of this trial, and suggests that addressing the below issues may improve the transparency of the trial's operation and objectives, reassure the community that appropriate protective policies are in place, and increase community understanding of a new and unfamiliar technology.

1. Intended purpose and use of the drones

Public information from NSW Police about the role and use of the drones in Moree has been inconsistent to date, particularly in relation to whether the drones will be used for surveillance. We suggest that greater clarity about the circumstances in which police intend to deploy the drones would assist in addressing community concerns about privacy, surveillance and over-policing.

By way of example, in a Moree Online News article dated 8 January 2026, Superintendent Chris Nicholson from NSW Police Aviation Command stated, "We will be flying proactively, so we won't just be responding to incidents. We will be putting aerial patrols over Moree in a proactive sense, where we'll look to prevent crime from happening."¹ However, at a press conference on 19 February 2026, you reassured the Moree community that the drones would *not* be used for surveillance.² Despite this reassurance, a NSW Police media release published on the same date stated that the drones would be used to "prevent" as well as respond to criminal activity.³

¹ Moree Online News, [Moree Police to trial drones in an Australian-first exercise](#) (8 January 2026).

² NSW Police Force, [PolAir-Remote officially launches in Moree](#) (19 February 2026). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9J2jVBtlo>. ABC News, [Police commissioner claims drones over Moree will not be used for surveillance](#) (19 February 2026).

³ NSW Police Force, [Australian first policing aviation capability. PolAir-Remote, officially launches in Moree](#) (19 February 2026).

We suggest it will be helpful for NSW Police to address this inconsistency and to clarify the intended use of the drones, including clear confirmation that the drones will not be used for surveillance. In particular, it will be useful for NSW Police to explain how the drones, without engaging in surveillance, will be utilised to prevent criminal activity. Further information about the types of crimes the drones are anticipated to respond to and how the video recording capabilities of drones will be utilised by police (for example, to coordinate police responses, for evidence-gathering, or both) may assist the legal community and broader public to better understand the purpose of the pilot.

2. Supporting legal framework

NSW Police has indicated that the remote-controlled drones operate essentially in a manner akin to police helicopters. There are, however, some distinctions between how drones and helicopters operate which suggest they are not perfectly analogous technologies, particularly in their operational and surveillance capabilities. For example, drones can operate much more silently (and therefore covertly), be flown much closer to people and buildings, be deployed much more rapidly, and can transmit live video feedback to a remote viewing location. It is also unclear whether the drones have facial recognition or other, more advanced, technologies.

Given the differences between drones and other police aviation capabilities, as well as the lack of clarity about the intended use of the drones, it is unclear to the Law Society what legislative framework NSW Police relies on to support the pilot. In particular, our members would appreciate clarification as to the legislative basis upon which the drones are deployed and footage recorded. As a matter of transparency, and to assist legal practitioners to understand this new policing capability, we suggest the relevant NSW Police Standard Operating Procedures and/or other guidelines in relation to drones ought to be made publicly available.

3. Government commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

An aspect of the trial the Law Society is particularly concerned by is the decision to pilot the drone trial in Moree. We would be grateful to understand the decision to select Moree as the pilot location, including what community consultation was engaged in prior to launching the trial. You will be aware that Moree has a high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population⁴ with a fraught history of segregation and discrimination. Our members are concerned that the operation of the drone trial may further contribute to the actual or perceived over-policing of Aboriginal people in Moree. We suggest NSW Police clarify how the objectives of the drone pilot correspond with the state and federal governments' broader commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly targets related to reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and adult contact with the criminal justice system.⁵

4. Evaluation of effectiveness and opportunities for community feedback

At the press conference on 19 February 2026, you welcomed community feedback on the drone trial in Moree. The Law Society would be grateful for further detail as to when and how the community can provide feedback to NSW Police. We suggest that evaluation of the drone trial should involve proactive community consultation, including with Aboriginal community leaders and organisations in Moree.

We understand that expansion to other sites in NSW is being considered. We would also be grateful for information on what metrics will be assessed in evaluating the success or effectiveness of the drone trial in Moree, and what wider community consultation will be conducted, prior to any expansion to other sites.

⁴ According to the 2021 Census, 22.9% of Moree's population were Indigenous: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Moree: 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats', <<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQS110031195>>.

⁵ *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Targets 10 and 11.

5. Privacy concerns

The Law Society notes community concerns about the drones recording private spaces and activities. Community members are entitled to assume activity in private spaces, including homes and yards, will not be surveilled or recorded by police, unless lawfully permitted. We suggest that information about how privacy considerations will be addressed in practice, including how NSW Police will distinguish between public and private spaces, would assist in addressing those concerns.

The Law Society is available to discuss these matters further with NSW Police. Inquiries in the first instance may be directed to Jade Fodera, Policy Lawyer, on (02) 9926 0218 or Jade.Fodera@lawsociety.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronan MacSweeney'.

Ronan MacSweeney
President