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## Foreign Correspondent: Come in Spinner

Airs Tuesday, May 17 at 9.30pm on ABC & iview

**A giant leap for mankind or a hazardous lurch into the unknown? A tiny Australian venture is racing to rule the skies – as drone companies vie to deliver mail, medicines and margherita pizza to your door. Zoe Daniel reports**

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Drones, remotely piloted by an ever-expanding army of hobbyists and commercial operators, are filling the skies. But we've barely glimpsed what lies ahead.

*"I see a not too distant future where drone deliveries are ubiquitous, where seeing a drone delivering a package to you or your neighbour is more common than seeing a postman or Fedex van deliver packages today."* – Matt Sweeny, drone entrepreneur

Competition to be first and best is fiercest in the US. Up against behemoths like Google and Amazon is brash Australian start-up Flirtey which claims a victory in being the first drone company to make an approved commercial delivery.

The ideas are big. So too is some of the hype.

*"Today the drone business had what some are calling its Kitty Hawk moment."* –TV newscaster on Flirtey's commercial milestone, invoking the Wright brothers' historic 1903 flight

Flirtey is teaming with experts in Nevada to develop smarter flying robots that won't plummet from the sky onto people's heads. They're also working with NASA to design air traffic systems for drones, safely away from airline space.

But many people still remain wary about drones on safety and privacy grounds – and dire warnings are coming from America's aviation industry. Last year commercial pilots reported about 1000 close encounters with drones near airports.

*"They do have batteries in them ... that will wreak havoc on an aircraft. Whether it hits the windscreen, some piece of the flight control system or is ingested in the engine, this is going to be a significant event."* – US Airline Pilots Association president

Stuck in the middle is the regulator, the Federal Aviation Administration. It's under pressure from the drone lobby – and the Congress - to open up the skies while keeping everyone safe.

*"We're dealing with commercial aviation that has zero fatalities a year. We don't want that number to change."* – Mike Whitaker, FAA

**Come in Spinner - by ABC Washington bureau chief Zoe Daniel, on *Foreign Correspondent* 9.30pm Tuesday May 17 and 10.30am Thursday May 19 on ABC TV & iview; and 6.30pm Saturday May 21 on ABC News 24. Also on [iview](#).**

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