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EXCLUSIVE NATIONAL CITY LIFE

Drone proposal could spell the end of Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks display

By [Carrie Fellner](#)

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Sydney's world-renowned New Year's Eve fireworks would become a thing of the past under a proposal to illuminate the harbour using hundreds of drones instead.

The Sun-Herald can reveal the City of Sydney council will canvass the possibility of replacing the annual fireworks extravaganza with a drone light show, which are rapidly growing in popularity around the world.



Drones paint pictures in the sky in Frankfurt, Germany in 2018. The show included 110 drones.
AP

It comes after last month's fireworks were [marred by controversy](#) due to the bushfires savaging large swaths of the state as the display lit up Sydney Harbour.

At Monday's meeting, Liberal councillor Craig Chung will put up a motion for City of Sydney council staff to explore and report back on the feasibility of replacing the fireworks with a drone light show.

Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore has not confirmed which way she will vote but her comments indicated she is likely to be receptive to the idea.

"As the first major city to celebrate New Year, all eyes are on us," Cr Chung said. "It would be a great signal to the world that Sydney is progressive and looking for ways in which it can reduce emissions."

There are serious safety concerns over the New Year's Eve fireworks due to severe weather, as the state battles an unprecedented bushfire disaster.

The first drone light display was launched in 2012 and since then there has been a rapid uptake of the concept worldwide.

More than 1200 drones took flight for a display at the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea, controlled through an automated software program.

Drones flanked Lady Gaga during her performance at the Super Bowl, and they were also used in some parts of the United States on Independence Day in 2018, when fireworks were deemed too much of a wildfire risk.

The drones, fitted with LED lights, can fly in formation to produce choreographed images. They are reusable and do not produce the same air and noise pollution as fireworks displays.

Shows using about 500 drones have been reported to cost as little as \$75,000, compared to the \$6.5 million cost of last month's fireworks in Sydney.

However they also present risks, with the drones unable to take flight during certain weather conditions, including strong winds.

Cr Chung also conceded he would not want to compromise the quality of the city's New Year's Eve celebrations.

More than one million people flood vantage points around the harbour for the fireworks display, which injects around \$133 million into to the economy annually.

"It has to be something comparably spectacular," Cr Chung said.

"People were very concerned at the fireworks going ahead while the bushfires were raging around Australia, so this at least will go part way to addressing the concern if we are facing crises like that."

Cr Moore said council staff were "continually investigating improvements and new technologies" and had already begun to incorporate lighting into the spectacle.

"We welcome all suggestions and feedback from the community as we look for cost-effective and sustainable ways to enhance the event," she said.

"In recent years, such innovation has led to a more environmentally sustainable display and increased lighting effects and projection.

"This year, the centrepiece of our display was Ziggy Ziegler's lighting effect which used the Sydney Harbour Bridge to create the brightest light beam in the southern hemisphere."



Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore. COLE BENNETTS



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