



Senate Space Inquiry

18 April 2008

National Space Society of Australia

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Space Society of Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into Senate Economics Committee: *The Current State of Australia's Space Science and Industry Sector*.

This inquiry is the first step towards providing a sustainable and national approach to decision making around space-related fields and the National Space Society encourages Government to seriously consider key recommendations.

It is vital that a single national coordinating agency is established to bring together all of Australia's capabilities in space and to create complementary programs and policies to advance Australia's unique positions. Currently there are a lack of unified policies on space which leads to uninformed or unsustainable decision making and a lack of confidence to deliver on important objectives.

A central agency can furthermore be a focal point for all of Australia's space related capabilities, allowing the opportunity to expose all work being conducted in this area. Without the central point, organisations and people work in isolation, unaware of what others are doing which could greatly complement their work. The central point would also allow for Australia to have a unified voice in international activities and provide credibility to international organisations conducting business development ideas within Australia.

As the primary space advocacy organisation in Australia, the National Space Society of Australia is the key conduit between the space industry (including Government and business activities) and the broader public. As a result, the National Space Society of Australia is in a unique position to highlight issues of concern. Additionally, the National Space Society of Australia is the focal point for general public inquiries into space, including education, entrepreneurial ideas and information sharing.

The National Space Society of Australia looks forward to engaging in dialogue with the Senate Economic Committee on Australia's space interests.



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2. INTRODUCTION

The National Space Society of Australia (NSSA), established in 1987, is the largest not-for-profit space advocacy organisation in Australia. The mission of the NSSA is to promote changes in economic, social and technological policies in all sectors of government and industry to advance the day when Australia has a robust and competitive space industry which ultimately supports the day when people live and work in space. This is achieved in a number of avenues:

- > Holding the preeminent biennial space industry conference series: Australian Space Development Conference, now in its 18th year.
- > Bringing the Australian space science community together for the Australian Space Science Conference, now in its 8th year.
- > General public outreach activities including presentations and seminars.
- > Media engagement, linking the media with space experts to provide commentary on notable events.
- > Hosting networking opportunities by bringing together people from government, industry and academia for the free exchange of information.
- > Providing support to other space affiliates, including museums and educational facilities/activities.
- > Providing assistance to space education groups for school-aged children.
- > Creating opportunities for young professionals interested in space to engage with the space community.

NSSA is part of an international organisation, National Space Society, with headquarters in Washington DC. Australian members join with over 30,000 members world wide to promote the mission and vision of the organisation.

To date, NSSA has sought Government engagement at key events to ensure that information is passed on to support robust decision-making. This has been particularly difficult without a central agency point of contact.



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3. COORDINATED NATIONAL DIRECTION

Australia has strong capabilities in space related fields, but lacks a national direction and programs. This Senate Inquiry is an important step in building a sustainable space community for national benefit.

NSSA organises some of Australia's preeminent conferences and public activities to promote information sharing. These notable events attract high profile Australian and international space leaders with a wealth of information, latest research and niche opportunities. To date, the NSSA, like all other space advocacy organisations, struggles to engage with the right people in Government and industry, mainly through a lack of a central coordinating body. This results in critical information not being passed on to the decision makers, resulting in uninformed decisions and lost opportunities.

Through a central coordinating agency, Australia can have a more united approach to space decision making. This would result in the same amount of finances being targeted more directly obtaining maximum benefit.

Recommendation

The establishment of a single national coordinating agency that covers all space related policies, programs and directions.

4. ROBUST POLICY MAKING

In the absence of a central coordinating agency, policies are created in isolation by different Government departments. With each Government department having limited direction on space, few policies are created, and when they are established, are done without appropriate consultation.

Policies need to be created relating to Australia's space community. The policies need to be coordinated from a national level with consultation.



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NSSA has often found that the lack of an established policy in space-related fields has resulted in Government departments being unable to make decisions with confidence, losing out on opportunities that are presented from time to time.

There are examples of counterproductive policies or where the lack of a governing policy has led to misaligned aims in different parts of the sector. For example, in terms of education, whilst school curricular supports space knowledge development (in physics, science and mathematics), it is not complemented by any external space education policy. The NSSA is frequently approached by schools and school students to provide information complementing their education – but there are few resources available in Australia simply due to a lack of coordinating policies and programs.

Recommendation

Complementary and robust policies established on space, coordinated by a central national agency.

5. PUBLIC OUTREACH

As the largest established space advocacy organisation in Australia, the NSSA is the face and channel of space community activities to the public. To date, this work has been achieved on the backbone of an enthusiastic volunteer membership base. Whilst these activities have been successful, the extent of the outreach is limited to volunteer time. As a result, the larger public is unaware of Australia's involvement in space including national icons to which Australia is proud of (for example, having trained astronauts or Australian satellites).

When large scale public events are held (eg a presentation by a touring astronaut), these events are over subscribed by the public. This indicates the strong interest and willingness of the public to be engaged on space topics. Furthermore, with international interest on Australia for space related activities (eg Virgin Galactic and space tourism), the interest is being spiked without an apparent Government response. Space is one of those subject areas where the general public is easily engaged, it has the 'wow' factor that stimulates new thinking and creativity.



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Without Government support, the only public outreach activities that occur are done by volunteers, in voluntary time. Hence the true capabilities that Australia harnesses are not exposed and the public has limited opportunities to appreciate Australia's past, current and future roles in space.

Furthermore, the lack of coordinated public programs, results in what little funds that are available, being spent in isolation, with limited benefit.

Recommendation

Development of a complementary suite of public outreach programs to raise awareness and harness public capabilities.

6. BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

It is clear that Australia is in a unique position to attract significant international investment, due to its location and positive economic conditions. However without a central point, Australia lacks credibility and seen to be 'too difficult' for international organisations to conduct business.

Over the last 18 years through the Australian Space Development Conference, the NSSA has frequently been approached by businesses and individuals frustrated at the lack of support and communication channels from the Australian Government. It has been difficult to ascertain the correct Government Department to approach on business opportunities. Without a point of contact, organisations such as the European Space Agency are discouraged from doing business.

Australia is unaware of the extent of its own capabilities and thus cannot build on and make coordinated approaches. As a consequence of there being no national point of contact or coordinating agency in Australia there is no one organisation that is generally familiar with what space capabilities exist and how they can be applied to meet Australia's national interests, needs and priorities. Even without a national space agency running funded programs simply having a "clearing house" or national point of contact charged with understanding what is happening with space technology and considering how those capabilities could be used for Australia's national benefit would be a huge step forward. If we find more extensive ways to use space technology for Australia's benefit then it is highly likely that Australian companies and researchers will find even better ways to



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serve these needs and hence the local space industry and community will grow through "market pull" rather than "technology push". The biggest bridge that needs to be built is between what you can do with space technology and how that can serve Australia's needs.

Recommendation

Coordinated point of contact for identifying Australia's capabilities with support for national and international business opportunities.



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7. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The NSSA firmly believes in the expansion of the Australian space community in order to achieve national interests.

The **10th Australian Space Development Conference** will be occurring in Adelaide, 21 – 23 July 2008. Various Government representatives have been approached. It is highly recommended that Government has an active presence at this Conference, which is uniquely placed to be the debating platform for Australia's space objectives – as described in the Inquiry. With a draft report due in June, this conference presents the ideal opportunity to engage with the broader space industry.

In addition, the space science community will be coming together for the **8th Australian Space Science Conference**, 29 September – 2 October. This conference series is popular and also the host to the workshop on Australia's first *Space Science Decadal Plan*.

The recommendations as discussed within this submission include:

- > The establishment of a single national coordinating agency that covers all space related policies, programs and directions.
- > Complementary and robust policies established on space, coordinated by a central national agency.
- > Development of a complementary suite of public outreach programs to raise awareness and harness public capabilities.
- > Coordinated point of contact for identifying Australia's capabilities with support for national and international business opportunities.