

National Committee for Space and Radio Science

A committee of the Australian Academy of Science

22 November 2017

The Hon. Stuart Robert MP
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission on Space Vehicle Tracking and Communication Facilities Treaty

Dear Mr Robert,

The National Committee for Space and Radio Science (NCSRS) of the Australian Academy of Science (the Academy) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the proposed Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America for Space Vehicle Tracking and Communication Facilities.

The NCSRS notes the long history of the proposed Agreement, stretching back to the early 1960s, largely in the form of a succession of Exchanges of Notes covering the establishment, maintenance and operation of the various facilities covered therein. As such, the proposed Agreement amounts to a consolidation of provisions contained in those Notes into a single document.

We also note these facilities deliver substantial dividends to both parties. For Australia, it allows some of our leading scientists access to world class astronomy facilities at a reduced cost, with the data collected being used by organisations such as Geoscience Australia, and the Bureau of Meteorology. For the United States, the facilities play a significant role in NASA's space programs such as their human and robotic missions, scientific satellites and deep space probes exploring our solar system.

Taken together, these facilities, the data they generate, and the co-operation between Australian and United States' scientists deliver substantial benefits for Australia's broader national, and scientific, interests.

Against this background, the NCSRS supports the Agreement's aim to formalise arrangements between Australia and the USA regarding operation of NASA space tracking and communication facilities.

The Agreement will also facilitate ongoing collaboration between Australian and NASA scientists and provide employment for specialist Australian personnel. The facilities will



continue to be operated for NASA by the CSIRO, which NASA funds through contractual agreements with CSIRO. Use of the facilities will only be for official NASA activities and peaceful purposes, and not in any way contrary to Australia's sovereignty or national interests.

The NCSRS notes the proposed Agreement will form a contract between NASA (representing the US Government) and CSIRO (representing the Australian Government). We also note the Australian Government is currently reviewing Australia's space industry capability, with recommendations expected in March 2018 that will likely outline the scope and nature of an Australian space agency. Without trying to anticipate these recommendations, the Australian agency may well be the appropriate authority for arrangements such as those addressed under the proposed instrument.

The NCSRS also notes the proposed Agreement provides for data sharing and independent Australian use of the facilities on a non-interference basis. This provides the opportunity to use world-class facilities at nominal cost to support the development of Australian planetary science. It can also enhance Australian and international science, allow industry spin-offs, contribute to training and skills development, and stimulate public interest. Such an arrangement would build upon but go beyond CSIRO's current role in these areas, and may be within the remit of an Australian space agency.

Finally, the NCSRS notes Article 8 of the proposed Agreements allows parties to publicly release information regarding their own activities. There is opportunity to expand current Australian activities through development of a national space science engagement program involving these facilities. This would help develop a national narrative around opportunities in a space economy and could be another aspect for an Australian space Agency to consider.

Should the Committee wish to meet with the Academy/NCSERS to discuss any aspect of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact either myself (fred.menk@newcastle.edu.au) and/or Dr Stuart Barrow, Senior Policy Analyst with the Australian Academy of Science (stuart.barrow@science.org.au).

Yours sincerely

Prof Fred Menk

Chair

National Committee for Space and Radio Science