Friday, 24 March 2017

Senator The Hon. Arthur Sinodinos
Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
Parliament of Australia
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator,

The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) for Australia strongly supports the creation and funding of an Australian Space Agency as a means to promote innovation, grow an Australian space industry, strengthen a vital bilateral link with the United States, and demonstrates to the world that Australia is at the forefront of science and technology.

As a first step towards the formation of an Australian Space Agency, AmCham supports the recommendations of the Space Industry Association of Australia (SIAA) that the Australian government appoint an Interim Board of Management.

Rather than repeat the arguments for an Australian Space Agency put forth in the SIAA's excellent white paper [1], AmCham would like to add a few points regarding partnership and collaboration among a future Australian Space Agency, the US government, and the Australian aerospace industry. Those three elements working together are critical to the success of an Australian Space Agency.

AmCham urges the Australian government to establish the closest possible relationship between the future Australian Space Agency and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a means for rapidly advancing Australia capability in space. When NASA was created in 1958, its founding legislation, the National Aeronautics and Space Act, directed the new Agency to pursue cooperation "with other nations and groups of nations." Australia's 50-plus year partnership with the US in space missions began in February 1960 with the signing of a cooperation agreement. The Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) began joint spacecraft-tracking projects with NASA in 1962, when CSIRO's Parkes radio telescope was used to receive signals from NASA's Mariner II spacecraft. The ties between NASA and Australia grew during the 1960s with the development of NASA's Deep Space Network for Apollo and numerous other space missions.

Based on this history, and the strong ties that CSIRO has built with Australian aerospace industry, AmCham believes that CSIRO should continue to lead civil space research and development (R&D) with support from the new Australian Space Agency.

[1] SIAA WHITE PAPER: ADVANCING AUSTRALIA IN SPACE, 6 March 2017

The American Chamber of Commerce in Australia

Level 6
48 Hunter Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Tel: +61 2 8031 9000
Email: nsw@amcham.com.au
Web: www.amcham.com.au

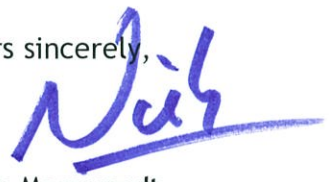
As one of America's closest allies, Australia should also be one of America's closest partners in space. Indeed, the US shares nearly all its civil and defence space products (data, imagery, intelligence, etc.) with Australia. In turn, NASA depends on Australia's world-class space tracking and satellite ground stations capabilities. But when it comes to partnership on the development of systems that go into space (satellites, rockets, crewed vehicles, space probes, etc.), there has been no space agency or space industry in Australia with which NASA could collaborate. To progress in space, Australia should collaborate with NASA on a broad range of space technologies and missions, while still maintaining a world-class ground-based space tracking and communication capability.

US aerospace companies have a large presence in Australia and employ thousands of Australian nationals in highly-skilled and high-paying engineering and technical jobs. The vast majority of these jobs are in aeronautics rather than space. However, given the right opportunities and incentives, these same companies could decide to invest in Australian space capability and jump-start an Australian space economy. The skills that Australian aeronautical engineers are applying to the development of aircraft systems could also be applied to Australian spacecraft. Australia already has the talent and industrial base to build a space industry, but a space agency would help to establish the right environment (opportunities, incentives, partnerships, collaborative agreements, export framework, regulations) for it to flourish.

This is a critical moment for the Australian government to engage with NASA as many of the key earth observation programs (Landsat, GOES, etc.) on which Australia's economy depends are under review. Indeed, with the world's pre-eminent conference of space agencies and experts taking place in Adelaide in September (the International Astronautical Conference, September 25-29), now is the perfect time for Australia to consider a major initiative of this nature. A strong message from the Australian government that these programs are of great commercial value to Australia might influence US decision makers. NASA/NOAA/USGS earth observation satellites enable Australia to explore for minerals, perform precision agriculture, monitor natural disasters, predict weather & monitor the environment (a key requirement for Australia's largest commercial development projects like offshore oil & gas on the NW shelf). The same technology (remote sensing satellites) that is used to find mineral resources on Earth can also be taken to outer space to find resources on asteroids, extending the demonstrated prowess of Australia's excellent mining industry beyond Earth. Close partnership with NASA's world-class R&D centres like the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) will help Australia progress in earth observation satellites and robotic spacecraft that will be essential for Australia's future space economy. These are just a few examples of sorts of the benefits that could flow to Australia from creating a world-class space agency here.

AmCham Australia, with help from some of our member companies with extensive expertise in these matters, would be pleased to answer questions or provide further input on this subject at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Niels Marquardt
U.S. Ambassador (ret.)
Chief Executive Officer