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Mr Kelvin Thompson MP  
Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
Parliament House

Dear Mr Thompson

**Questions taken on notice 9 February 2010 concerning the NASA Agreement**

Thank you for your letter of 11 February 2010 to Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research advising him of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (the Committee) decision to recommend binding treaty action be taken in respect of *Exchange of Notes constituting an Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Australia to amend the Agreement concerning space vehicle tracking facilities of 29 May 1980, as amended* (NASA Agreement), tabled on 2 February 2010.

I would like to thank the Committee for its prompt and thorough consideration of the NASA Agreement within a tight timeframe.

With regard to the public hearing held by the Committee on Tuesday 9 February 2010 at which I gave evidence regarding the NASA Agreement, I took three questions on notice. This letter provides answers to those questions.

*1. When did the negotiations concerning the current iteration of the NASA Agreement start?*

The Hon Julie Bishop MP, then Minister for Education, Science and Training wrote to her Ministerial colleagues in June of 2007 seeking their agreement to commence formal negotiations with the United States Government, through NASA, to amend the NASA Agreement to include a new facility at Yarragadee.

Please note the nomenclature “Yarragadee” is interchangeable with “Dongara”. Dongara is the closest main town to the facility, while Yarragadee is the area in which the Western Australia site is located. “Dongara” will be used in the NASA Agreement at the US Government’s request.

*2. What function does the Dongara facility serve?*

The Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System Facility near Dongara in Western Australia is owned and financed by NASA, but managed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) as the cooperating agency in Australia under the NASA Agreement.

The facility is a modestly sized data receiver (a single 11m dish and small support building, as illustrated at **Attachment A**). It is used for tracking and communication with

earth-orbiting civilian satellites as part of the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System (TDRSS).

The TDRSS is a network of communications satellites and ground stations used by NASA for space communications. The system is designed to increase the time spacecraft are in communication with the ground and improve the amount of data that can be transferred.

More information on the TDRSS may be found at <https://www.spacecomm.nasa.gov/spacecomm/programs/tdrsS/default.cfm>.

The Dongara facility is an automated, unmanned receiver. However, CSIRO has made arrangements with Electro Optic Systems (EOS), the contractor which operates Geoscience Australia's nearby satellite laser ranging facility, to provide for service to the NASA facility as required.

*3. What is the latitude and longitude of the Dongara facility?*

-29° 2' 45.60", +115° 20' 56.40"

The Dongara facility is located near Mingenew, almost due east from Dongara. Around 100m away is MOBLAS 5, which is a laser-ranging geodesy facility run by Geoscience Australia, and a co-located Doris facility (a French orbit determination and positioning system), also run by Geoscience Australia.

Please note that the Dongara facility is not co-located with or near the Defence Signals Directorate Kojarena base, which is near Geraldton, two hours north-east of the facility by road.

Yours sincerely



Michael Green  
General Manager  
Innovation and Space Branch  
Manufacturing Division

*15* February 2010

ATTACHMENT A

NASA TDRSS Facility, Dongara, Western Australia (-29° 2' 45.60", +115° 20' 56.40")  
December 2007

