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23 March 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Members,

Subject: Submission to the Inquiry on the Australia-U.S. Space Agreement

I write to you today as a concerned Space Industry Participant with regard to the ongoing Inquiry into the "Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America on Technology Safeguards Associated with United States Participation in Space Launches from Australia" (hereinafter referred to as the Agreement). Space exploration and technology are strategic frontiers for Australia, holding the promise of not only advancing scientific knowledge but also bolstering national security and economic prosperity. It is in this context that I wish to share my thoughts on the Australia-U.S. Space Agreement (TSA).

Opportunities Presented by the Agreement

The TSA underscores a significant leap in the bilateral ties between Australia and the United States, offering a platform for enhanced technological exchange and cooperation in space ventures. This partnership could stimulate our burgeoning commercial space sector, promising economic growth and technological advancements. Moreover, the alignment with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) Guidelines echoes our commitment to nonproliferation and contributes to global security, positioning Australia as a responsible space-faring nation.

Concerns and Recommendations

Despite the opportunities, there are imperative concerns regarding the implications of the Agreement on Australia's sovereign capabilities in space technology and our ambition to be recognized as a mid-tier space power.

1. **Technological Sovereignty and Operational Dependencies:** The stringent technology safeguards and operational dependencies potentially undermine our ability to innovate and may impede the development of indigenous space technologies.
 - a. **Recommendation:** It is vital to consider terms to ensure greater technology sharing and foster domestic capability building.
2. **Stifling of Local Industry and Innovation:** There is a risk that the Agreement might limit opportunities for Australian industries, affecting our competitive edge in the space sector.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Establishing an innovation fund or incubator programs could support Australian space startups in developing proprietary technologies in parallel with this agreement to sure up confidence.

3. National Sovereignty and Decision-Making: The requisite U.S. approval for space operations could constrain our sovereignty and operational flexibility.
 - a. Recommendation: Advocating for the creation of a bilateral working group to oversee the Agreement's implementation could safeguard Australian interests.
4. Geopolitical Implications: The Agreement aligns Australia closely with U.S. space policy, potentially affecting our relationships with other space-faring nations.
 - a. Recommendation: Consider, where applicable, diversifying international partnerships is crucial for maintaining a balanced geopolitical stance.
5. Economic Dependencies and Regulatory Hurdles: An over-reliance on U.S. technology could make the Australian space sector vulnerable to external factors, while regulatory complexities might hinder project execution.
 - a. Recommendation: Diversification of partnerships and streamlining regulatory processes are essential steps towards mitigating these risks.

In conclusion, while the Australia-U.S. Space Agreement presents an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration, it is imperative to address the aforementioned concerns to ensure it serves Australia's long-term strategic interests in space exploration and technology. We must strive for a partnership that not only leverages the strengths of both nations but also promotes an autonomous and vibrant Australian space sector.

Thank you for considering this submission. I look forward to the Committee's recommendations on this matter.

Sincerely,

Dharshun Sridharan
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