



Treaties Committee approves balloon flight agreement with US

Federal Parliament's Treaties Committee has approved the extension of an Agreement between Australia and the United States of America for the Conduct of Scientific Balloon Flights for Civil Research Purposes until 2022.

The Agreement provides NASA the use of facilities and services for balloon launchings and recoveries in Australian territory, tracking and transmission of information from each balloon, and the recording and sharing of information from these flights.

In April 2010, a large NASA balloon became involved in an accident at launch in Alice Springs crashing into a car. Committee Chair, Kelvin Thomson MP, said the committee was very interested to hear what measures had been put in place to ensure such an incident isn't repeated.

"From the evidence presented during the inquiry it appears that appropriate corrective procedures have been introduced," Mr Thomson said.

Mr Thomson said Australia has derived significant scientific and economic benefits from activities conducted under the 2006 Agreement, especially through encouraging collaboration between Australian and NASA scientists, and these benefits certainly justify continuing the relationship.

The Treaties Committee has also approved a series of other treaties, including two agreements amending the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, an Agreement between Australia and the European Space Agency on Space Vehicle Tracking, four Tax Information Exchange Agreements and a Social Security Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Latvia.

The Social Security Agreement gives improved access to Australian and Latvian retirement benefits and greater portability of these benefits between the two countries. Under this Agreement, residence in one Party's territory will not affect a person's entitlement to benefits under the legislation of the other Party. People who move between Australia and Latvia will be able to do so in the knowledge that their rights to benefits are recognised in both countries.

The Committee's views on all these treaties are covered in Report 123 which is available on the Committee's website:

www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/reports.htm or by contacting the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4002.

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