



**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TREATIES**

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Treaties Committee supports ratification of agreement on the conduct of scientific balloon flights for research purposes**

Mrs Margaret May MP, Acting Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties today (Monday 12 September) tabled *Report 67* which includes a recommendation that Australia ratify an agreement that allows for continued cooperation between Australia and the United States of America on scientific balloon flights. Since the previous agreement expired in 2002, the CSIRO in conjunction with NASA have continued to collaborate on scientific balloon flights through a non-legally binding agreement.

Balloons are launched from the Alice Springs Balloon Launching Facility in cooperation with the National Scientific Balloon Facility (a NASA facility managed by the Physical Science Lab of New Mexico State University) and the School of Physics, Environmental and Mathematical Sciences at the University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) campus. Balloons are partially filled with helium and expand until they reach a float altitude of about 40 kilometres, which takes the balloon above 99.5 per cent of the Earth's atmosphere. When inflated, some balloons reach approximately the same size as the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

To date over 100 flights have been conducted from the Alice Springs Balloon Launching Station. Scientific findings of balloon launches from Alice Springs include the first gamma ray emission from a spinning neutron star, the discovery of a gamma ray annihilation line from a black hole at the galactic centre, observations of the supernova star which exploded in 1987 which have not been repeated since and high resolution images of the galactic centre.

'This Agreement will enable Australia to continue to contribute to international research in astronomy with an increased potential for further scientific discoveries from its vantage point for viewing the Milky Way', Mrs May said.

In addition to the above treaty action, *Report 67: Treaties tabled 21 June 2005* outlines the Committee's review and recommendation that binding treaty action is taken in relation to a Social Security agreement with Ireland.

Report 67 is available on the Committee's website:  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/report.htm>  
or by contacting the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4002.

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