

**Economics Legislation Committee**  
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio  
2017 - 2018 Budget Estimates  
31 May – 1 June 2017

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**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

**TOPIC:** Astronomical functions

**REFERENCE:** Written Question – Senator Carr

**QUESTION No.:** BI-104

Following the implementation of arrangements for the future of the AAO:

1. What organisation will act to facilitate access to optical astronomy facilities?
2. Who will support the development, manufacture and supply instrumentation for optical astronomy facilities?
3. Who will publish, support, encourage, research reports, papers, and valuations on matters around astronomy?
4. Who will advise the Minister on matters related to optical astronomy?
5. Who will implement Australia's international obligations in relation to optical astronomy?

**ANSWER**

While the functions listed in these questions are all currently ascribed to the AAO under the *Australian Astronomical Observatory Act 2010*, the AAO does not currently have exclusive responsibility for these functions in Australia. Following the implementation of the new optical astronomy framework, from July 2018, it is expected these functions will be shared across two new research sector-led consortia, key policy and program areas in the department and its portfolio agencies, and the university sector.

1. A number of options are currently being considered including that this function remains as part of the optical instrumentation consortium.
2. The consortium that takes on the optical instrumentation capabilities currently carried out by AAO based at North Ryde will support the development, manufacture and supply instrumentation for optical astronomy facilities. It should be noted that there are other groups in Australian universities, notably the ANU, that also do this already.
3. The consortium that takes on the optical instrumentation capabilities currently carried out by AAO based at North Ryde is expected to publish, support, encourage, research reports, papers, and valuations on matters around astronomy. Many Australian universities, CSIRO, research collaborations and Australian Research Council (ARC) Centres of Excellence also do this and will continue to do so.
4. The department, in consultation with the research sector, including the consortia, and drawing on appropriate expertise will continue to advise the Minister on matters related to optical astronomy.
5. The department will manage Australia's strategic partnership with the European Southern Observatory. Existing arrangements regarding Australia's participation in the Giant Magellan

Telescope project, through the governance, project oversight and technical contributions of the Australian National University and Astronomy Australia Ltd as Founding Partners, will continue unchanged. Australia's international obligations with respect to other aspects of optical astronomy will be managed as they are now: through a range of entities including Astronomy Australia Limited, a not-for-profit company (established under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy) whose members are Australian universities and research organisations with a significant astronomical research capability.