

45th IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)  
Scientific & Technical History (3)

Author: Ms. Kerrie Dougherty  
Powerhouse Museum, Australia, kerrie.dougherty@gmail.com

SPACEPORT AUSTRALIA: EARLY PROPOSALS FOR EQUATORIAL LAUNCH FACILITIES IN  
AUSTRALIA**Abstract**

Proposals to establish an equatorial space launch facility in Australia were widely canvassed from the latter half of the 1980s into the early 21st Century, although none has yet come to fruition. These proposals, however, were not the first suggestions for the establishment of an equatorial launch facility in Australia: more than twenty years earlier, between 1960 and 1965, there were no less than four proposals or investigations into the possibility of establishing an equatorial launch facility in or near Australia, two of them related to the programs of the European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO). This paper will outline these four early equatorial spaceport proposals: a British suggestion in 1960 for an Anglo-Australian/ELDO facility on Cape York; a 1962-3 CNES investigation into the potential of Darwin as a location for the French national launch facility that would ultimately be established at Kourou in French Guiana; an independent proposal put forward in 1964 by expatriate Australian physicist Dr. Philip K. Chapman (who would be selected as an Apollo scientist astronaut in 1967) for an Australian-led international spaceport, potentially based on Manus Island, north of Papua New Guinea; and the Weapons Research Establishment's 1965 ELDO-commissioned study for an equatorial launch base near Darwin. It will discuss the origins of each proposal, the sophistication of the proposal development before it was terminated and the reasons why the project did not come to fruition.