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THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE'S 2008 INQUIRY INTO THE CURRENT STATE OF AUSTRALIA'S
SPACE SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY SECTOR: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
EVOLUTION OF AUSTRALIAN SPACE POLICY

Abstract

The Australian space science and industry sector has undergone a number of fundamental transitions in the past 50 years. The country has gone from having an active role in developing space technologies and conducting launch activities in the 1960s to a somewhat dormant period during the 1970s and 1980s, followed by a boom of space activities with what was considered an imminent expansion of commercial launch activities in Australia in the late 1990s, coinciding with scientific and engineering projects catalysed by the Australian Government's FedSat satellite program. The present decade, however, has seen those hopes of seeing a vibrant Australian launch industry dashed by lack of demand and financial viability for various commercial launch operators and the end of the FedSat program.

The Australian space policy and administrative infrastructure has undergone similar transitions coinciding with those that took place in the Australian space sector through the decades. Governmental space projects in the early decades culminated in the opening of the Australian Space Office with the active pursuit of a role for Australia in space advancement. This was followed by a change of role for the Australian Government from being an active participant in space activities to that of a consumer, facilitator and regulator. Recent years have seen a further shift in the underlying sentiments of the Australian Government in its space policy to becoming what may be described as an indifferent spectator.

This paper undertakes a critical review and analysis of Australian space policy through the decades, with particular attention paid to the contents of the 2006 Australian Government Space Engagement: Policy Framework and Overview and the recently completed inquiry into the current state of Australia's space science and industry sector by the Economics Committee of the Senate. The paper will also conclude with some comments and observations on the future direction of the Australian Government's space policy.