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SHAPING A NATION'S SPACE POLICY: AUSTRALIA

Abstract

Over the past two years, public debate about space within Australia has led the Australian government to propose the creation of a new space policy. This debate included a public enquiry by the Australian Senate into the current state of Australia's space science and industry sectors. Following the Senate's report, the Government initiated a process to create a space policy for Australia. However, this is not the first time that an Australian Government has invited public consultation as a forerunner to developing a space policy and resultant strategy. During the 1980s, the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Academy of technological Sciences to prepare a report on space science and technology in Australia. The resulting report, A Space Policy for Australia, influenced the government to create a space policy and establish an administrative office, the Australian Space Office, under the Australian Space Board, but did not lead to the establishment of a formal space agency. In less than six years, a plethora of consultancy reports again influenced the direction of Australian space strategy and this led to the replacement of the Space Board with a supporting Space Council. Following a change of government in 1996, the Australian Space Office and Space Council were abolished. This formal institutional arrangement was replaced by a small space unit within a government department. The lack of long term consistency in Australia's policy making and formal space institution structure has led to a long decline in Australia's space capabilities and capacity. This technological downturn has resulted in a fading acceptance within the international arena of Australia as a spacefaring nation. Australia now needs to rebuild its reputation within the international space community as a potential emerging space power. This paper compares Australia's past policy making approaches and the resultant space-related institutional structures to determine whether the current process will provide a different (or new) perspective to space policy making and pave the way for a new space player in the Asia Pacific Region.