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“NO ONE’S FAR FROM ANYONE, ANYMORE”: AUSTRALIA’S OVERSEAS
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION AND ITS ROLE IN SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS
AND SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

In August 1946, the Australian Government established the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (OTC) as a national entity responsible for all international telecommunications services into and out of Australia. In October 1957, OTC became one of the earliest communications bodies to monitor the signals of the world’s first satellite, Sputnik-1. This association with the origins of spaceflight, marked the beginning of OTC’s 35-year participation in space exploration and satellite communications, which continued until OTC was merged with Australia’s domestic telecommunications carrier, Telecom, in 1992.

This paper will provide an overview of the space-related role and activities of the Overseas Telecommunications Commission, which was a founding member of the INTELSAT and INMARSAT satellite telecommunications consortia and played a significant role in providing TTCM services for both systems. OTC operated Australia’s satellite communications infrastructure, which not only connected Australia to the world via satellite, but also supported the space exploration activities of NASA and the European Space Agency, particularly the Apollo lunar exploration program. OTC facilities played a crucial role in bring television from Apollo 11 and later lunar landing missions to the world, in addition to supporting planetary exploration missions.