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TRAILBLAZER PROGRAM AS PPP MODEL FOR AUSTRALIA'S SPACE INDUSTRY GROWTH

Abstract

The key to creating, developing, sustaining and transforming the space industry is meaningful and strategic partnering between the public and private sectors. High barriers to entry (especially to gain flight heritage), a small space ecosystem and limited Venture Capital in a resource dominated economy makes it challenging to foster an Australian space ecosystem. The key to creating, developing, sustaining and transforming the space industry is meaningful and strategic partnering between the public and private sectors.

In the last five years, Australia has jump-started the local space industry with the creation of the Australian Space Agency in 2018, and the development of a sustainable space ecosystem driven by the demands of industry. However, industry alone, without appropriate government policies and capital investment, has not driven development at scale.

In 2021, the Australian Government recognised that reforms are needed to transform research and innovation and accelerate the translation of research into products and services used by industry. The Australian Government Research Commercialisation Action Plan committed to invest USD 1.4 billion over 11 years across a comprehensive set of reforms to create stronger links between universities and industry. A Trailblazer Universities Program was established with a total investment of USD 242M to create new research capabilities, drive commercialisation outcomes, and invest in new industry engagement opportunities in areas of national manufacturing priority.

Under this scheme, the University of Southern Queensland has established the Innovative Launch, Automation, Novel Materials, Communications, and Hypersonics (iLAUNCH) Trailblazer Hub with a USD 120M co-investment from Government, three universities and over 20 industry partners to build Australia's sovereign space capability. The iLAUNCH program is addressing critical gaps and accelerating the development of new materials, rapid satellite manufacturing, communication technologies, hypersonics and integrated sensing systems through industry research, commercialisation, and manufacturing.

Building an Australian space capability and its associated industrial and research and development (RD) ecosystem is critical to ensure the emerging payload technology manufacturers can access space responsibly, and capitalise on commercial opportunities without competing with, or being dependent on, international space economies. Australian space companies are already working on low- and mid-Technology Readiness Scale (TRL) technologies. iLAUNCH enables these companies to accelerate to higher TRLs, building a complementary supply chain and overcoming commercialisation challenges.

In this paper, we will present the business model for iLAUNCH, its implementation stages and key ingredients for success.