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FROM ANCOSPAR TO THE AUSTRALIAN SPACE OFFICE: EARLY PROPOSALS FOR AN
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL SPACE AGENCY (1959-1987)

Abstract

Until the formation of the Australian Space Agency in July 2018, Australia was the largest economy within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development without a national space agency, a comprehensive government-supported civil space program (encompassing commercial, public good, scientific, and educational space activities), or significant commercial space industry. Yet as early as 1960, the Australian delegation's report on the third meeting of the Committee on Space Research noted that it could be "said with justice that Australia probably occupies fourth place in the hierarchy of space research".

From 1959, the civil scientific and defence agencies involved in Australian space activities pushed for the development of a national space agency and a formalised national space program. In the 1970s, as the economic value of space applications increased, commercial entities also began to encourage the Australian Government to establish a national space agency as a necessary component of developing an internationally competitive national space industry.

This paper will outline the various early proposals for an Australian space agency, commencing with the 1959 proposal put forward by the Australian National Committee for Space Research (ANCOSPAR). It will trace the succession of ultimately unsuccessful space agency proposals up to the establishment of the Australian Space Office in 1987, thirty years after the beginning of the Space Age. Although established by the Australian Government in response to the recommendations of a 1985 report by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, the Australian Space Office never held the status of a national space agency and was terminated in 1996 with a change of government.