

National Committee for Space and Radio Science

A committee of the Australian Academy of Science

National Committee for Space and Radio Science submission on Australian Space Agency International Space Investment (ISI) initiative

The National Committee for Space and Radio Science (NCSRS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Space Agency's consultation on the International Space Investment initiative (ISI). The National Committee welcomes the ISI initiative as a welcome move that will generate opportunities to grow the Australian space economy through linkages with international agencies.

We acknowledge that program details are in development, and thank the Agency for its round of consultations. The scheme is likely to attract considerable attention. The principal selection criteria relate to the Agency's priority areas and the ability to grow industry capacity, while assessment will be by a single panel of selected reviewers.

The NCSRS makes the following comments which, informed by the round of consultations and discussions with colleagues.

1. In principle the purpose of this scheme is similar to the long established ARC Linkage Program. The ARC has considerable experience in running such schemes, including establishing funding rules covering eligibility requirements, selection criteria, assessment, reporting criteria, and ethics requirements. We recommend the Agency considers the Linkage scheme in the first instance as a template to guide development of ISI funding rules.
2. Clarity will be needed on what constitutes an 'industry.' At present this could be an SME, a large multinational, a university group, a government agency, or an NGO. In order to grow capacity for local space activities, both upstream and downstream activities should be supported. The ISI two stream approach aims to stimulate new opportunities and simultaneously build capacity and create jobs. Nevertheless, there should be priority to projects which grow new capability rather than just expand existing activities, especially within large established corporations. This should not be a scheme which simply improves profit margins.
3. In order to stimulate both short- and long-term capacity growth, priority should be given to projects which not only leverage international collaborations but also which have a focus on collaboration and training at the national level. Consideration should also be given to educational and public interest outcomes.
4. R&D is essential to stimulate innovation and new industry, while university-based research programs are very effective at establishing international collaborations with foreign space agencies and world leading research programs. Therefore priority should be given to such research-based programs which can most effectively leverage expertise and transfer knowledge.



5. The Agency is a civil entity. Therefore, projects from industries whose primary source of income is derived from the production or distribution of munitions or the like should not be supported.
6. There needs to be clarity on what budget items will be supported: e.g. salaries, consumables, travel, other expenses, and on what and for whom. At present it seems that successful grants could be spent on almost anything. The application process should include submission of a detailed budget request, with prior approval required for significant variations. The various ARC schemes are good examples of how this can be implemented.
7. There must be reporting requirements including reporting expenditure against the approved budget, and means of assessing performance and terminating non-performing projects. Reporting should include statements for public release.
8. The requirement for 80% of the budget to be spent in Australia mitigates against buying-in to major international programs which may be able to provide significant strategic returns. Consideration can be given to special cases where it may be possible to leverage large international projects for significant national benefit if the 80% rule is relaxed.
9. To ensure probity, value for money and selection standards compatible with international space agencies, peer review should be part of the application assessment process. Track record needs to be part of the selection criteria.
10. An appropriate intellectual property framework needs to be established to protect the interests of all parties while facilitating knowledge and technology transfer.

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