



SOUTH AFRICAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY

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Zelna Jansen
Committee Secretary
Portfolio Committee on Science and Technology
Parliament of the Republic of South Africa
zjansen@parliament.gov.za

29 May, 2008

Dear Ms Jansen

RE: NATIONAL SPACE AGENCY BILL

I refer to the invitation by The Portfolio Committee on Science and Technology for stakeholder comment on the South African National Space Agency Bill (B202008), circulated as document <http://www.pmg.org.za/files/bills/080505b20-08.pdf>

South Africa is critically reliant on space science and technology. Every day, space-based systems deliver information and services that protect lives and the environment, enhance prosperity and security, and stimulate scientific, industrial and economic development.

Up until now, South Africa's space-related activities have been conducted in a disparate and uncoordinated manner. The establishment of a National Space Agency will provide a much-needed coordinating function to foster the development of space technology and its applications for national development.

The South African Astronomical Observatory therefore strongly supports the creation of a National Space Agency to drive the implementation of the future national space programme.

We are pleased to see that in para 1(c) one of the stated Objects of the Agency is to "*foster research in astronomy, earth observation, communications, navigation and space physics.*" Indeed, these are the fundamental space sciences that underpin all the space applications that support various societal benefits.

It is our view that that the existing space-related national facilities, such as the South African Astronomical Observatory, the Hartebeesthoek Radio Astronomy Observatory and the Hermanus Magnetic Observatory, all have much to contribute to the future space programme, particularly in the domains of research and

development, and also in capacity building. These facilities have some key components of a future space programme, such as space situational awareness (e.g. space debris, near-Earth objects and space weather) and space geodesy and their applications.

The national facilities are not only centres of excellence in research, but also have extensive, relevant technical expertise, extensive human capital development programmes and outreach programmes in the space sciences. This supports Object of the Agency 1(d) *“advance scientific, engineering and technological competencies and capabilities through human capital development and outreach programmes.”*

The National Research Foundation, under which these facilities fall, is also the adhering organization for a number of international space-related bodies, such as the International Astronomical Union (IAU), the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG). In this context, these facilities can further support Object 1 (e) *“foster international co-operation in space-related activities.”*

We therefore believe that the national space agency should not attempt to duplicate existing mature capabilities, but should rather play a coordinating role with industry, academia and the national research facilities. We are therefore pleased to note that the Bill envisages in the Functions of the Agency, paragraph, 5 subsection (2)(a) that the Agency may enter into agreements with other entities for the purpose of achieving its objects.

In conclusion, we strongly support the creation of a National Space Agency as a means to develop a coordinated and robust set of national space capabilities distributed across industry, academia and the research councils. In this way the reach and impact of the future South African space programme will be maximised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Martinez', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Dr Peter Martinez

Division Head: Space Science and Technology