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Mr Peter Truswell

Head, India Economic Roadmap Taskforce
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
10 John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 2600

Subject: *A New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India*

Dear Mr Truswell,

Thank you for inviting the Space Industry Association of Australia ('SIAA') to make a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs ('DFAT') on [*A New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India*](#).

SIAA is the peak body for the space sector in Australia, providing a collective voice on behalf of over 80 domestic and international member organisations with capability across all aspects of space activities. SIAA membership reflects a breadth and depth of capability, including launch providers, advanced manufacturing, law firms and professional services firms within a diverse membership of startups, small-to-medium sized enterprises ('SMEs') and aerospace primes.

SIAA's members are increasingly interested in engaging with India. Many of them are already present in the Indian market and others are eager to engage with India and are navigating current challenges and opportunities.

SIAA applauds DFAT's decision to create a new economic roadmap with India; this offers a chance to assess the concrete achievements that have been made since 2018, and to consider how Australian resources can best be deployed to overcome current obstacles that prevent organisations from fully engaging with this rapidly growing economy.

Close engagement with the Indian space sector has the potential to bring vast economic benefits to Australia; India has one of the fastest growing space sectors in the world. India produces over 2.5 million

STEM graduates a year¹, many of whom already want to work in Australia's space and space adjacent sectors. The Indian government has passed legislation to support more foreign direct investment and has an increasingly successful pool of companies who want to engage with Australian partners.

As our submission shows, Australia's space sector is well positioned to take advantage of this.

Our submission contains SIAA's detailed assessment of what the new roadmap should cover, including

- Expanding the Australian Governmental Presence in India
- Improving Bilateral Lines of Communication across the Space and Technology Sectors
- Establishing the Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy
- Funding Opportunities to Foster Economic Partnerships
- Ongoing Support of B2B Engagement
- Joint Space Capability Database
- The Road to Net Zero
- The Talent Pipeline
- Consideration of Defence Export Controls
- Consideration of Intellectual Property

I commend our response to you and hope it is of assistance to DFAT. We are available to provide clarifications or answer questions regarding our submission at your convenience.

Regards,

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¹ <https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/the-global-distribution-of-stem-graduates-which-countries-lead-the-way/>

1. Expanding the Australian Governmental Presence in India

The increased presence of Australian Government in-country representatives in India over the past decade reflects Australia's increasing awareness of the importance of India as an economic partner. SIAA commends the Australian Government for opening the Bengaluru Consulate-General in 2023, and notes that this was a key recommendation in the Australian Government's 2018 'Indian Economic Strategy to 2035'². SIAA members have told us that this was a concrete change that has already had appreciable effects to the ease of entering the Indian market and doing business there, and we thank DFAT and the staff of the Consulate-General for their work.

Australian space businesses have benefitted from the opportunity to engage with representatives of DFAT and the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade). Australia now has five missions within India (compared to six in China and nine in the USA). Noting the scale of the Indian economy, SIAA believes that it is necessary for the Australian government to scale up its in-country presence to adequately support current and future economic partnerships, to support a serious economic strategy for Australian engagement with India. Further economic cooperation between Australia and India would be enhanced through expanding both the scale of this diplomatic presence, as well as the seniority of Australian Government representatives engaged in India.

The importance of this Australian governmental in-country presence has been emphasised by SIAA Members, and it is clear that effective human connections are vital to the success of any Australian business that wants to engage in the Indian market. Breaking through the levels of India's federal government, patronage networks, and personality driven industries cannot be done without knowing who to speak to. This is where an enhanced government presence, with more senior DFAT representatives can greatly assist in fostering further economic cooperation, as senior Australian representatives can more easily engage with their Indian counterparts that have similar seniority in Indian government or industry. The connections fostered by Australian Government representatives are essential, as noted by one SIAA member who suggested: "Personality is the friction point between India and Australia. If your interlocutor doesn't have those connections, it's no help."

The next economic roadmap should consider the importance of increasing Australia's government presence in India, both in scale and seniority. This will send the strongest possible signal that Australia has the capability to engage with a flourishing Indian space sector.

2. Improving Bilateral Lines of Communication across the Space and Technology Sectors

² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/trade-and-investment/india-economic-strategy/ies/overview.html#:~:text=By%202035%20India's%20five%20largest,for%20Australian%20business%20than%20India.>

SIAA recommends that in addition to expanding the in-country DFAT and Austrade presence in India, it should also seek to expand its focus on fostering economic partnerships between space and technology organisations. DFAT's updated economic strategy identifies space as a sector of interest. Connecting to India's space sector was one of the impetuses behind the establishment of the Consulate-General in Bengaluru. If a new economic roadmap seeks to foster increased Australian engagement with India's space, tech, and science sectors, then it will require whole-of-government support.

In a space specific context, SIAA members have recognised other examples of international in-country representatives who based in India that directly represent their country's space and emerging technology sectors. These representatives are thereby tasked with specifically driving economic cooperation between their country and India's space and technology organisations. The strategic positioning of an Australian government representative within the Bengaluru Consulate-General who is tasked with expanding Australia's space and technology engagement with India, would greatly assist Australian space and technology businesses interested in partnering with India.

Australia is extremely well positioned to engage with the Indian space sector. We have willing Australian and Indian space companies, an advantageous geographic position, bilateral government interest in space, and strong human links within the diaspora community. A more targeted focus on space and technology within the Bengaluru Consulate-General will foster economic partnerships across one of the fastest growing space sectors in the world, with further benefits to adjacent science, technology, natural resources, and AgriTech sectors.

Australia is also well positioned relative to other developed countries and in combination with Australia's national advantages of proximity, strategic desirability and diaspora links, potentially has a first mover advantage. Should a new economic roadmap focus on developing the Australian government's focus on the space and technology sectors, through a dedicated appointment within the Bengaluru Consulate-General, Australia will have the opportunity to greatly expand its economic engagement across the space and technology sectors.

3. Establishing the Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy

Another positive step the next roadmap could take is to signal a recommitment to institutional network building. DFAT's Update to the Indian Economic Strategy recommended the establishment of an 'Australia-India Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy'³ that would 'bridge the gap between policy and technology development and contribute to an open, multi-stakeholder model of technology governance, bringing together government, academia and industry.' Consolidating Indian and Australian stakeholders across the public and private sector would maximise the effectiveness of DFAT and Austrade as interlocutors for Australian companies trying to invest in and engage with India.

4. Funding Opportunities to Foster Partnerships

³ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/india-economic-strategy-update-report.pdf>

Both 2018's 'An India Economic Strategy for 2035'⁴ and the 2022 'An Update to An India Economic Strategy for 2035'⁵ discuss the role of government in helping Australian science and technology sectors (including Space) access the necessary funding to build effective partnerships in the Indian market. DFAT has already helped establish several generous grant programs that SIAA members who wish to do business in India are eligible for, and this has already helped Australian firms to flourish.

Many of SIAA's members are startups and SMEs, and ready access to starting capital is key to companies in the early stages of fostering economic partnerships internationally. Programs such as the International Space Investment (ISI) India⁶ grants are key to supporting companies who are trying to build the type of transnational partnerships DFAT want to encourage. SIAA recognises the positive impact that existing schemes such as the Rapid Innovator and Startup Expansion (RISE) program⁷, the ISI or the Australian-Indian Strategic Research Fund⁸ have had for our members. Expanding these programs may not be necessary; rather, to provide the maximum impact and realise the potential of emerging Australian businesses, a future roadmap should recognise the importance of a consistent timetable in the grants program. One SIAA member reported that a recent obstacle they encountered in setting up a partnership with an Indian firm was finding out that the Export Markets Development Grants⁹ have been paused until late 2024 or early 2025. Clarity around ongoing grant funding is vital to support Australian companies are to enter the Indian market. For grant programs to be effective in fostering further economic cooperation, they need to be awarded consistently, transparently, and at a consistent cadence as per their aims.

In sum, the current government support schemes have been valuable to SIAA members, and to accomplish the objectives that the Australian government has set for closer ties to India's space sector, there needs to be a recommitment to clarity and consistency.

5. Ongoing Support of B2B Engagement

SIAA and its members recognise that Australian businesses can also further access the Indian market through B2B engagement. A SIAA member has described how in India itself, there is an increasing focus on the role of commercial operators in space, which drives a need to move beyond government grants, which will continue to have their place in fostering innovation and R&D. One SIAA member noted; "[Grants are] not the best way to do sustained nation to nation bilateral partnerships... India is moving from a purely government to an increasingly commercial market... government to government sort of national priority collaboration is the first step and that provides the base that grants augment quite nicely." SIAA therefore emphasises the need for DFAT and Austrade to continue the positive direction that has been started on building direct links between Australian and Indian firms.

⁴ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/trade-and-investment/india-economic-strategy/ies/overview.html#:~:text=By%202035%20India's%20five%20largest,for%20Australian%20business%20than%20India.>

⁵ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/IESUpdate>

⁶ <https://www.industry.gov.au/news/international-space-investment-india-projects-grants-now-open>

⁷ <https://riseaccelerator.org/>

⁸ <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/australia-india-strategic-research-fund-aisrf>

⁹ <https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/grants/export-market-development-grants>

There are a range of avenues to facilitate B2B matchmaking across the Australian and Indian markets. This includes the proposed 'Australia-India Innovation Network'¹⁰, that would sit under Austrade. The network would foster partnerships between Australian and Indian sci/tech firms, run show case events, help with soft landings in the Indian market etc. We encourage DFAT to commit to this scheme, as it is precisely the kind of business focussed program that will maximise the economic growth of the Australian space sector without needing recourse to government grants. Other B2B matchmaking programs are developing, such as the Australian-India Business Exchange program (AIBX)¹¹ through Austrade to help Australian firms access the Indian market. We encourage DFAT to consider the expansion of existing B2B schemes that will over time help the Australian space sector foster further economic engagement with India.

6. Joint Space Capability Database

Launched in mid-2023, the Australian Space Industry Capability Database was developed by SIAA to provide industry and global partners an overview of the size and capability of the Australian space sector. The Database is supported by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), The Australian Space Agency, the Office of Defence Industry Support, and SmartSat CRC. The Database is free to use, accessible, and being continuously updated to represent opportunities within the Australian space sector while demonstrating the overall supply chain. The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) also hosts a comparable database for the Indian space sector.

These two databases operate on different schema. However, if we could join or combine them, there is enormous potential for increasing the ease of doing business as an Indian-Australian partnership. This could be achieved through different methods: at its most basic, SIAA could work with IN-SPACe to make them partner programs, where joining one database automatically gives you access to the second. More ambitiously, there is potential there is potential to utilise A.I. or other machine learning tools to join the two databases and reveal opportunities across Australia and India.

Whichever approach is taken, bringing the databases together could facilitate a broader strategic alignment of resources and expertise within our industries, rather than relying on select individuals to scope partnerships within existing arrangements. Better capability databases mean that the industry has better information, resulting in tangible gains to the ease of doing business in this rapidly growing field.

7. The Road to Net Zero

In the industry, there is a saying that 'the road to net zero goes through space.' As the World Economic Forum notes, more than fifty percent of essential climate variables are measurable only from space.¹² The Indian-Australian economic engagement is going to be greatly affected both by climate change as

¹⁰ <https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/programs-and-services/australia-india-innovation-network>

¹¹ <https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/programs-and-services/australia-india-business-exchange>

¹² 'Global Future Council: Space for Net Zero,' World Economic Forum, White Paper September 2021, p.6.

well as the push to adapt existing industries and business methods to lower or zero emissions technologies. The space sector has a key role to play here.

SIAA believes that if there is a continued push to make it easier for Australian space firms to do business with India, our members can build the vital space infrastructure of India as well as Australia. This would have enormous benefits to Australia economically, but also diplomatically and most importantly ecologically. Existing space businesses in both India and Australia, including SIAA Members, are already pioneering net zero practices within emerging space technologies—from green propulsion systems to sustainable habitation.

Monitoring plankton or algae blooms in the Indian Ocean; measuring methane or carbon dioxide levels in the upper atmosphere; tracking cloud movements in the monsoon season: these are just some of the ways that space-based infrastructure finds the information that policy makers need to set the course to Net Zero, in Australia and in India. The roadmap should encourage cooperation in space not just as another tech sector, but as a vital tool in facing the great policy challenges of the twenty first century, including Net Zero.

8. The Talent Pipeline

Australian engagement with the Indian space sector will be enhanced by continued access to Indian talent. SIAA members employ Indian citizens within both Australia and wholly owned subsidiaries in India; our academic members compete with the world’s leading research institutions to attract Indian graduates and postgraduates; and continued Indian investment in the Australian space sector will encourage further migration of Indian citizens to work in Australia's space sector.

The current immigration scheme has served SIAA’s members and the Australian economy well; our members report that it is relatively straightforward to navigate visa regimes such as the Global Talent Employer Sponsored¹³ scheme to employ Indian citizens in Australia. While these schemes are not within DFAT’s direct remit, we suggest that the new India economic roadmap should be a blueprint for a whole-of-government approach. India produces the most STEM graduates in the world, with 2.55 million students graduating in STEM fields in 2020¹⁴. India now has several world-leading STEM research institutions which often have strong links to Australian universities and research centers. The maintenance and strengthening of those links will be vital to the continued growth of Australian trade and investment in the Indian space domain and other sci/tech sectors. It is important that the next economic roadmap continues to support Australian businesses to access skilled talent from India.

The Maitri Scholars Program¹⁵ is a promising initiative to bring the best Indian STEM postgraduates to Australia. The scheme currently includes ‘funding towards professional development, including attendance at functions and events organized by the Centre and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.’ SIAA hopes to see this built upon. SIAA is strongly encouraged by the Federal Budget’s commitment of funds in this area: the MATES program, the replacement of the Global Talent Visa with a

¹³ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/visas-for-innovation/global-talent-scheme>

¹⁴ <https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/the-global-distribution-of-stem-graduates-which-countries-lead-the-way/>

¹⁵ <https://www.australiaindiacentre.org.au/our-programs/maitri-scholars-program>

more targeted National Innovation Visa, the reduction in the qualifying time for the Temporary Skill Shortage visa, and the expansion of the validity period for the Extended Business Visa are all positive steps. The roadmap should include concrete steps that will facilitate the recruitment of Maitri scholars directly out of the scheme; efforts to ensure that that space sector and space adjacent firms are aware of the program and the postgraduates working in it.

SIAA members have also noted the proposed cap on the number of International Student visas. We would note that if this cap causes a reduction in the number of international students studying STEM subjects in Australia that may have a potential dimming effect upon the flow of graduates into Australia's STEM sectors and professions. SIAA therefore expresses the hope that the settings for the cap will consider the importance of keeping up student numbers in these strategically important fields that feed into the space sector.

SIAA commends the current approach of making it as easy as is practically possible for Australian firms and universities to make use of Indian talent. The roadmap should reflect this success and stress the importance of keeping that approach.

9. Consideration of Defence Export Controls

SIAA Members work across civil, commercial and defence space activities. To continue to foster economic partnerships across Australia and India, it is key that changing legislation covering Defence Trade Controls does not stifle increased economic partnerships, whilst also ensuring that Australia's defence capability is protected. To ensure that companies can continue to enhance economic cooperation with India, underpinned by a new Roadmap, Australian businesses need to be able to access clear, timely advice from the Department of Defence that allows them to navigate a changing regulatory environment whilst continuing to foster economic ties with Indian partners.

SIAA supports the future expansion of the Foreign Country List to include countries such as India. We note that the expansion of this will enhance future economic cooperation between Australia and India as the expansion of the Foreign Country List increases Australia's trusted partners and opens opportunities for Australian business to access key export markets and skilled workers to support Australian defence companies.

10. Consideration of Intellectual Property

A current ongoing challenge to further economic engagement with India focuses on current challenges to the protection of Australian intellectual property. Australian businesses and organisations are responsible actors who are broadly supportive of engagement with India, but are potentially discouraged by concerns around IP protection, which inhibit potential partnerships. By increasing an understanding of how Australian businesses can engage with India and access economic opportunities in ways that do not compromise Australian IP, this will enhance the confidence of Australian companies to engage with the Indian market, thereby furthering economic cooperation.

India will be one of the most exciting economies for Australian firms to do business with across the years and decades ahead. SIAA reiterates its gratitude for the chance to make a submission on this matter. We would be eager to be of any possible further assistance to DFAT as it develops the new roadmap and

would be pleased to act as an intermediary if DFAT or Austrade wishes to directly canvas any of SIAA's members.