

Media Release

The Hon Ian Macfarlane, MP

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MOSCOW TALKS ON AUSTRALIAN LAUNCH PAD

Australian and Russian leaders will sit down next week to finalise negotiations on the use of the Aurora space launch vehicle on Christmas Island.

Industry Minister, Ian Macfarlane, will spend two days in Moscow clearing the way for the ambitious project in talks with the Russian Space Agency.

"We are very close to setting the bilateral arrangement with the Russians for safeguarding and licensing launch technologies for use on Christmas Island," said Mr Macfarlane.

The protocols are 90 per cent agreed on what will be the first full foreign deployment of Russian launch vehicles.

"We need to protect the Aurora launch technologies in accordance with our commitments under the Missile Technology Control Regime, and as in any international agreement, there are particular security concerns on both sides that must be respected in the final negotiation."

"Russia obviously wants to protect the technology that will be used on the island while we want to ensure Australia can manage its sovereign interests in the general conduct of operations on Christmas Island," he said.

The Christmas Island project would proceed under the auspices of the general space cooperation agreement signed by the two Governments on 23 May 2001.

Three further protocols are being negotiated specifically to manage technology safeguards and licensing matters associated with the proposed Christmas Island spaceport.

"Australia recognises the sensitivities that Russia feels around transferring its launch technologies for use on Australian soil. In turn I shall be putting to the Russians the needs of the Australian Government to administer our sovereign interests."

"It is vital that both national positions are accommodated to our mutual satisfaction – the Christmas Island project can not proceed without this. I'm sure agreement will be possible with goodwill and commitment from both sides," said Mr Macfarlane.

Last year the then Minister for Industry, Senator Nick Minchin, announced a government incentive of \$100 million to assist Asia Pacific Space Centre with the development of the space launch facility on Christmas Island.

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