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Australia's First Homegrown Rocket Launch Marks Milestone Despite Early Crash

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Australia's private space sector took a bold leap forward with the launch of its first domestically designed and manufactured orbital rocket, despite the vehicle crashing shortly after takeoff. The historic attempt, led by Queensland-based Gilmour Space Technologies, demonstrated both technical progress and the growing ambition of Australia's emerging space industry.

The launch occurred Wednesday morning from the Bowen Orbital Spaceport in North Queensland, where the rocket named Eris lifted off for its inaugural test flight. While the

vehicle remained airborne for less than a minute and failed to complete its intended trajectory, the launch marked the first time an Australian-made orbital launch vehicle had taken off from Australian soil. According to the company, Eris achieved 23 seconds of engine burn and 14 seconds of flight time before losing control.

Spectators gathered in Bowen reported hearing a loud blast followed by large plumes of smoke. Fortunately, initial assessments confirmed the launch infrastructure remained intact, minimizing potential setbacks to future test flights.

Co-founder Adam Gilmour expressed optimism despite the rocket's short flight. "Got off the pad, I am happy," he posted on social media. "Of course, I would have liked more flight time, but happy with this." In a formal statement, the company praised the result as "a strong step forward for Australia's sovereign space capability," especially after an 18-month wait for regulatory clearance.

This launch attempt followed a series of delays due to weather and technical anomalies, including a power supply issue and premature opening of the payload fairing, the protective nose cone that shields satellite cargo. With those issues resolved, the company moved ahead, earning praise from local officials and residents.

Gold Coast Mayor Tom Tate commended Gilmour Space Technologies, saying the company embodies the region's innovative spirit. "They truly exemplify the Gold Coast 'have a go' attitude," Tate said. "They're literally a Gold Coast company aiming for the stars." He added that the launch highlights the diversification of the local economy beyond tourism and construction.

The significance of the event was not lost on residents. Andrew Hyland, who traveled from Mackay for his third attempt to witness a launch, said, "Being Australia's first launch in 50 years and first Australian-made, it's part of history." Douglas and Helen Tawse, locals from Bowen, were among those watching from the beach. "If they're talking about more satellites going up, it would have to help Bowen's economy in the long term," Mr. Tawse said.

The project received notable support, including AU\$5 million from the Australian Government for the Eris vehicle. Though Gilmour Space Technologies is privately operated, the launch reflects growing investment in Australia's independent space capability.

According to Professor Jonti Horner, an astronomer and astrobiologist from the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), the attempt signifies a broader trend in space development. “Historically, only government-run space agencies had the capability to launch rockets,” he noted. “Now, the commercial sector is stepping in, making access to orbit more affordable and driving technological innovation.”

The company’s long-term goal is to position Australia as a launch destination for commercial satellites, offering services to both private entities and government partners. While Wednesday’s outcome wasn’t a full success, it placed Australia firmly on the map as an emerging player in the global commercial spaceflight industry.

Gilmour Space says it will analyze the flight data and move forward with future missions, building on the momentum of this groundbreaking effort. The company’s perseverance and vision continue to inspire both industry leaders and everyday Australians, proving that even brief flights can carry a nation’s hopes skyward.