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Defence Inks Deal for Cutting-Edge Sovereign Space Initiative

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The Australian Department of Defence has signed a \$50 million agreement with Optus and several partners to launch a sovereign Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite by 2028, signalling a step forward in national security and space innovation. The initiative aims to enhance Australia's self-reliance in space capabilities and promote collaboration between government, industry and academia.

Announced on 14 July 2025 at Inovor Technologies in Adelaide, the agreement brings together Defence, Optus, Inovor Technologies, HEO, the University of Southern Queensland's iLAUNCH Trailblazer, and the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG). The satellite will be built by Inovor at Lot Fourteen in Adelaide and will carry experimental research equipment, including a high-resolution optical telescope and an optical-radio frequency communications payload.

Chief Defence Scientist Professor Tanya Monro AC said the project was a strong example of cross-sector collaboration. Optus will manage satellite operations from its Belrose Space Operations Centre in Sydney, expanding Australia's sovereign capability to compete with major players in satellite communications, such as Starlink. Inovor's CEO, Dr Matthew Tetlow, described the initiative as a milestone in the development of Australian-made space technologies that will support advanced manufacturing and create skilled jobs.

The project builds on the legacy of the Buccaneer Main Mission satellite, previously launched with Australian-designed defence payloads. Although the federal government is contributing \$4 million to this new initiative, critics argue the figure falls short of what is needed to match Australia's long-term strategic ambitions. The 2024 Integrated Investment Program outlines between \$5.2 and \$7.2 billion for satellite communications over the next decade.

As regional tensions continue to escalate, the development of sovereign space infrastructure is seen as increasingly important for national security. While this announcement reflects progress, defence analysts note that sustained investment, rather than symbolic funding

announcements, will be essential to ensure Australia's long-term resilience in the contested space domain.