

Scientists test superjet technology in Australia

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An Australian Department of Defence handout of the launch of a test vehicle as part of a hypersonics trial in Woomera, South Australia. Australian and US scientists have successfully tested hypersonic aircraft technology which could revolutionise international flight, officials said

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The trial was the first of up to 10 tests to be conducted at the Woomera desert range as part of a joint US-Australian military research operation, said Defence Science Minister Warren Snowdon.

The programme, called Hypersonic International Flight Research Experimentation (HIFiRE), is investigating hypersonics technology and its potential for next generation aeronautics.

"Hypersonics is the study of flight exceeding approximately five times the speed of sound, and this trial has successfully tested the flight and mission control systems that will be used in future experiments," Snowdon said.

The test vehicle was carried into space aboard a rocket launched from Woomera and then dived back into the atmosphere to test the hypersonic flight technology.

[Nitrogen gas](#) valves were used as thrusters to manoeuvre the craft in space and correctly position it for reentry into the atmosphere, offering scientists a "wealth of new data," Snowdon said.

"This trial has ... demonstrated that hypersonic flight could become a reality in the not too distant future, offering immense economic and strategic benefits for Australia," he added.

Hypersonic technology offered "quantum leaps" in speed and fuel efficiency and had the potential to dramatically reduce intercontinental travel times, said Snowdon.

During trials of similar technology in 2007, the defence department said travelling time from Sydney to London could be cut to as little as two hours for the 17,000-kilometre (10,600-mile) flight.

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