

NASA to launch 3 rockets from private Australian space port

June 8 2022, by Rod McGuirk



The Arnhem Space Centre is seen on the Gove Peninsula in Australia's Northern Territory May 2, 2022. NASA will launch a research rocket from remote northern Australia this month in the agency's first launch from a commercial facility outside the United States. Credit: Equatorial Launch Australia via AP

NASA will launch a research rocket from remote northern Australia this

month in the agency's first blast off from a commercial space port outside the United States.

Three suborbital sounding rockets will be launched from the Arnhem Space Center on Indigenous-owned land near the mining town of Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory on June 26, July 4 and 12, said NASA and the [launch pad](#)'s owner, Equatorial Launch Australia.

The launch site was chosen because it is in the Southern Hemisphere and close to the equator.

"This commercial launch range in Australia opens up new access to the Southern Hemisphere's night sky, expanding the possibilities for future science missions," NASA associate administrator for the Science Mission Directorate Thomas Zurbuchen said in a statement.

The 12.2-meter (40-foot), 2,200-kilogram (4,900-pound), Canadian-designed Black Brant IX rockets would focus on the Alpha Centauri A and B star systems. A third mission would study X-rays emanating from the [interstellar medium](#)—the clouds of gases and particles in the space between stars.

NASA's Heliophysics Division director Nicky Fox said the launches more than 300 kilometers (186 miles) into space would "allow us to explore how a star's light can influence a planet's habitability among other things."



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Prime Minister Anthony Albanese welcomed the first NASA [rocket](#) launch in Australia since 1995. The launch site then was a military rocket range near Woomera in South Australia state.

"This is a really exciting project. This is about not just the rocket launches itself, but it's about sending a message to younger Australians and, indeed, Australians of any age, who might be looking at retraining for future careers, of how important science is," Albanese said.

"We want the next generation to really look at STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) as part of Australia's future and that's why this is an important project," Albanese added.



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Equatorial Launch Australia Executive Chairman and Group CEO Michael Jones said while NASA was his company's first client, advanced commercial discussions were underway with another nine rocket companies.

He expected at least two more launches from the [space](#) center this year and more than 50 launches annually within a few years.

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