

Government announces package of new measures to drive space sustainability

- Science Minister George Freeman announces new Plan for Space Sustainability to demonstrate UK leadership in sustainable space, in line with ambitions set out in the National Space Strategy
- UK industry will work in partnership with government to develop a new Space Sustainability Standard, which will incentivise companies to adopt best practice
- government will also review the regulatory framework, including exploring ways of lowering insurance costs for sustainable missions

Science Minister George Freeman has today (Thursday 23 June) launched a new Plan for Space Sustainability, a raft of measures which will demonstrate the UK's commitment, ambition and drive to improve the UK's sustainable use of space.

He announced the plan in a speech to the 4th Summit for Space Sustainability in London, as part of a package which aims to make the UK a world leader in driving sustainability in space, just as the country is here on Earth. The minister announced that the government will work with industry to establish a new Space Sustainability Standard, which will aim to incentivise companies to adopt best practice in space sustainability and officially recognise those who take steps to minimise their footprint on the Earth's orbit.

The Standard will help to make the UK a more attractive place to operate and invest and help unlock sustainable private investment, helping to further drive the growth of the space sector. The Standard will be developed and tested by industry and academia, in partnership with government and the Civil Aviation Authority – the UK spaceflight regulator.

Minister Freeman also confirmed that the UK will undertake a regulatory review to incentivise sustainable practises, investment and growth, allowing today's latest innovations in technologies such as Active Debris Removal (ADR), In-Orbit Servicing and Manufacturing (IOSM) and sustainable development to become tomorrow's norms in space operation. Doing so will ensure that the UK's regulatory regime will evolve in line with advances in technology, and lead the way on protecting the space operating environment.

This is expected to include work alongside industry, academia and insurers to explore ways of lowering insurance premiums for sustainable missions, helping to drive greater space sustainability.

Speaking at the Space Sustainability Summit at the Science Museum in London today, Science Minister George Freeman said:

The huge increase in commercial satellite launches will see tens of thousands of small satellites launched in the next 10 years.

A 'Wild West' space race without effective regulation risks a growing crisis of debris in space, adding to the existing threat from 400 redundant satellites and a million pieces of debris.

To harness space for sustainability, we need an agreed framework of standards for measuring and managing debris, improving satellite repair and retrieval and kite-marking genuinely sustainable supply chains.

As it was with shipping in the 17th century and cars in the 20th, the key will be regulation which enforces good industry standards and reduces the cost of insurance and finance for a satellite launch which can show it is compliant. With London as a global capital of insurance and venture financing, we have an opportunity to use our historic role in space science to now harness responsible finance for sustainable space.

That is why today I am announcing our Plan for Space Sustainability, a package of announcements which demonstrates the UK's commitment to using our regulatory leadership. This plan will ensure a safe and sustainable commercial space sector which rewards responsible satellite programs by lowering the costs of launch licenses and insurance for sustainable satellites and space missions.

Outlining the UK's global ambitions, the minister announced further government investment to support Phase 3 of the implementation of the UN Office for Outer Space Activities (UNOOSA) [guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space](#). To achieve a safe and sustainable space environment, the UK is playing a leading role alongside UNOOSA in the adoption of these guidelines, which set out how countries and companies can help preserve the outer space environment for future generations. Phase 3 of the project will help to build on the successful work of earlier phases in building awareness of the guidelines among UN member states and identifying barriers to their adoption.

The UK government firmly believes that the growing volume of debris in space is both environmentally and commercially unsustainable, requiring swift action to clean up the Earth's orbit as well as to ensure future projects minimise their footprint through recyclable manufacturing, retrieving satellites and mitigating any debris.

Active Debris Removal (ADR) is a key tool in cleaning up space junk in Earth's orbit, and the minister confirmed today that the government's existing ADR programme will receive £5 million funding for its latest phase. The programme will now move at pace to select 2 consortia projects for grant awards this summer. It was also announced that the National Space Surveillance and Tracking Programme, which recently received an additional £5 million funding, will include a new 'monitor your satellites' collision assessment service, which has now opened for registration for all UK licensed satellite operators following successful trials with a number of companies.

Today's announcements, led by industry and government in partnership with UK Space Agency, demonstrate the UK's aim to lead a global regulatory framework that both expects and requires the very best standards, driving down the cost of licensing for supply chains which meet these requirements.

Dr Paul Bate, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

Space sustainability is a complex challenge requiring a variety of solutions, but it also presents a significant opportunity for the UK to demonstrate global leadership. We're developing new missions and capabilities to improve how we track objects in orbit and accelerate technologies such as active debris removal, while setting new standards and working closely with international partners to keep space open for future generations.

The UK space sector employs around 47,000 people directly around the UK and supports around 190,000 jobs in the supply chain, contributing almost £7 billion to the UK economy each year. By building on the commitments of the National Space Strategy and ensuring the space industry can continue to operate safely and sustainably well into the future, to help to protect and grow these high-quality jobs across the country for generations to come.