Press release: Thales Alenia Space signs contract with the UK Space Agency to work on climate change mission

Thales Alenia Space has signed a contract with the UK Space Agency to work on MicroCarb, a joint UK-French satellite mission which will measure sources and sinks of carbon, the principal greenhouse gas driving global warming. It is the first European mission intended to characterise greenhouse gas fluxes on Earth's surface and gauge how much carbon is being absorbed by oceans and forests, the main sinks on the planet.

The mission, scheduled to launch in 2020, will also contribute to international efforts to measure how much carbon gas is being emitted by natural processes and human activities. MicroCarb will enable the UK Space Agency and CNES to pave the way for a longer term operational system in response to the Paris COP21 Agreement.

Ben Olivier, CEO of Thales Alenia Space in the UK and Jo Johnson, Science Minister.

Thales Alenia Space engineers will work closely with the CNES project team and then take full responsibility to manage and deliver the satellite AIT programme at the UK's National Satellite Test Facility (NSTF) in Harwell. This world class facility, due to open in 2020, has been awarded £99 million in funding by the UK Government's Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to boost the UK's space capabilities for the design and build of more complex space instruments and technologically advanced satellites.

Science Minister, Jo Johnson, speaking on a visit to Thales Alenia Space's Belfast facility, said:

"The UK space sector is brimming with talent and our collaboration with France on MicroCarb is an excellent platform to demonstrate our cutting-edge science and engineering, which is at the core of our Industrial Strategy.

"It is great to see our £99m investment in the new National Satellite Test Facility is already making a difference for the sector. This facility will make Harwell a world-class hub for innovative space technology, helping UK companies like Thales Alenia Space be more competitive in the global market and support our ambition to capture 10% of the global space market by 2030."

Ben Olivier and Jo Johnson in Thales clean room.

The contract reflects Thales Alenia Space's strategy of growing its European footprint and is fully in line with market trends and growth dynamics.

Ben Olivier, CEO of Thales Alenia Space in the UK, said:

“MicroCarb will be a significant demonstration of what space technology and science from satellites can contribute to the understanding of the carbon cycle; ultimately helping decision makers to develop the best policies to make the World a better place. We are proud to be a part of this effort.”

For Thales Alenia Space in the UK, this is a significant milestone in the recognition of the company’s developing capability as a Prime contractor in the UK for major space missions.

The Assembly Integration and Test of the MicroCarb satellite is Thales Alenia Space in the UK’s first opportunity to work with CNES to deliver on an important Earth Observation Mission. It also demonstrates the confidence and trust placed in Thales Alenia Space in the UK and its teams of highly skilled engineers.