

OTC Satellite Earth Station Carnarvon WA



The Overseas Telecommunication Commission (OTC) Satellite Earth Station Carnarvon, an Earth station in Australia, was established to provide more reliable and higher quality communications for the Apollo program. The North American Space Agency (NASA) contracted Australia's OTC "to provide an earth station near Carnarvon to link the NASA tracking station in that area to the control centre in the USA",¹ also contracting COMSAT to launch three Intelsat-2 communications satellites.

Television and NASA-assist operations

The "sugar scoop" antenna became operational on 29 October 1966 when Intelsat-2A, the first of the three satellites launched, gave OTC and the Australian Broadcasting Commission a brief chance to test satellite television communications as the satellite drifted to failure over the Indian Ocean. On 24 November 1966, test patterns for the first live telecasts from Australia to England were successful. The next day, a live BBC television broadcast from a studio in London featured interviews linking UK families with their British migrant relatives standing in Robinson Street, Carnarvon.

The "sugar scoop" became famous again on 21 July 1969, the day of the Apollo 11 Moon landing, relaying Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon from NASA's Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station, Canberra, to Perth's TV audience via Moree earth station - the first live telecast into Western Australia.

The OTC station's eight years of communications support for the Carnarvon Tracking Station began on 4 February 1967, three weeks after Intelsat-2B was launched. A larger parabolic antenna was commissioned in late 1969 to upgrade the support for the later Apollo missions. OTC continued to provide communications support for NASA space programs until the NASA station closed early in 1975. Thereafter it tracked some NASA missions on its own account.