Mr Chairman

Modern society has become reliant on space for position, navigation, timing, communications, meteorological, earth observation and other space-enabled services.

This is particularly true of Australia. We rely on satellites to deliver telephone and broadband internet to our dispersed population. We also make extensive use of earth observation satellite data to monitor water resources, land use and the severity of droughts and bushfires.

These space-enabled technologies are more cost efficient and effective than previous terrestrial alternatives and are
now within the financial reach of more countries, and vital to development. Our own region of the Asia-Pacific has one of the fastest take-up rates for space enabled technologies in the world.

But the right of all countries to have access to the global commons of space is coming under increasing threat from the proliferation of space debris.

More than 500,000 pieces of debris are currently tracked as they orbit the Earth. They travel fast enough for even a tiny object to damage a satellite or a spacecraft, thereby creating more space debris.

Mr Chairman

The challenge of space debris is increasingly recognised as a pressing issue for our own Asia-Pacific region.

We applaud the ASEAN Regional Forum’s continued efforts to raise awareness of the space debris challenge through ARF Space Security Workshops. Australia and Vietnam initiated with the inaugural space security workshop in Singapore in 2012, and Australia has engaged in subsequent workshops.

Australia will participate in the 4rd ARF Space Security Workshop in Singapore next week.

Mr Chairman

Australia has ongoing concerns about the development and testing of anti-satellite missiles (ASAT).
ASAT weapons have the potential to create vast amounts of space debris that endanger space assets and space-enabled services upon which all countries rely.

Even if such missiles do not engage a target, their testing and deployment sends an unhelpful and potentially destabilising message to the international community. This message is not conducive to international peace and cooperation in the space domain – and it is counter to the international community’s efforts to build transparency and confidence around space activities.

Any initiatives which seek to deal with the issue of non-weaponisation of space, or discourage the threat or force against space objects should include in their scope ground-based anti-satellite weapons.

We see ASAT weapons as constituting the most pressing threat to space infrastructure – and regard initiatives that fail to address the ASAT concern as a major deficiency.

Australia urges the international community to focus on practical and achievable steps we can take together to address the real threats to our space activities, particularly orbital debris.

We believe that a clear focus on practical and timely TCBMs on outer space activities will yield real benefits for all.

Mr Chairman

It is important that we work together on the issue of space debris and take collective action.
We could look to developing a legally binding treaty but treaties take time and at present there is no Treaty in prospect that address the threat of ground-based anti-satellite weapons.

Alternatively we can embrace immediate practical solutions to these issues, such as non-legally binding transparency and confidence building measures (TCBMs). The value of TCBMs in outer space was recognised by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Outer Space TCBMs, whose report was adopted without a vote by the UN General Assembly in July 2013.

Australia urges the international community to focus on practical and achievable steps we can take together to address the real threats to our space activities, particularly orbital debris.

Thank you.