

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, announced today that the United States and Canada have concluded an intergovernmental agreement for the establishment and operation by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration of a temporary tracking facility to be located near Pouch Cove, about 16 miles from St. John's, Newfoundland. The agreement went into effect as of February 23, 1972.

The National Research Council of Canada is co-operating with NASA in making arrangements leading toward establishment of the facility which will consist of radio transmitting and receiving equipment, computers, data handling and recording equipment, and telephone and telegraph systems in transportable vans.

The facility will support NASA's manned space flight Skylab programme, which will follow the conclusion of the current Apollo programme. The basic objectives of the Skylab programme are to conduct scientific investigations in earth orbit, perform experiments and gather data for earth resources survey studies, and investigate man's capabilities as a participant in long duration space flight activities.

The tracking facility will provide command and telemetry data communications with the 100-foot long, 150,000 pound Skylab workshop as it passes over the North Atlantic after launch from Cape Kennedy during the first half of 1973.

Later in the project the facility will provide voice and data communications with the Apollo Command module as it ferries the Skylab crew of three astronauts to the workshop.

The facility is scheduled to be in operation for Skylab pre-mission tests in December 1972. In view of the temporary nature of this facility and the short time available for training highly skilled technicians and engineers without previous experience in operating facilities of this type, the station will be manned primarily by United States personnel. It is expected that 25% of the staff of 28 engineers and technicians and 9 logistics and maintenance personnel will be Canadian.

Tenders for site preparation and construction have already been invited from local Newfoundland contractors for this project. When the facility is in operation, the operation costs are expected to be approximately 500,000 dollars per year.