



MEDIA RELEASE

SENATOR KIM CARR

Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research

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SEND AN INTERSTELLAR SMS DURING NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK

Australians will have the opportunity to send text-like messages to potential intelligent life beyond Earth thanks to an initiative to be launched today to mark National Science Week.

From 10.30 am today, until 5.00 pm Monday, 24 August, the public can visit www.HelloFromEarth.net to post goodwill messages that will be transmitted to the nearest Earth-like planet outside our Solar System likely to support life.

The planet – Gliese 581d – is eight times the size of Earth and some 20 light years away (194 trillion km). It was first discovered in April 2007. Due to its size, it is classified as a ‘Super Earth’.

Messages sent during the 2009 National Science Week will arrive in the planet’s vicinity by around December 2029.

Messages can be no longer than 160 characters and will be transmitted from the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex at Tidbinbilla, with the close cooperation of NASA.

Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research entered the first message at the launch of National Science Week at Questacon in Canberra, which read:

“Hello from Australia on the planet we call Earth. These messages express our people’s dreams for the future. We want to share those dreams with you.”

“What better way to discover the limitless possibilities of science than to give Australians the opportunity to try to seek contact with other intelligent life forms,” Senator Carr said.

“As a child I, like many Australians, stared up at the stars and wondered what was out there. Now science has allowed me to send a personal message that may answer that question.

“This is one way that we are stimulating debate around big questions in science, such as whether life exists outside Earth, and generating enthusiasm about science, which is what National Science Week is all about,” Senator Carr said.

The spokesperson for *HelloFromEarth.net* and editor of the Australian science magazine COSMOS, Mr Wilson da Silva, said the project had excited global interest.

“We’ve secured incredible support from around the globe, including NASA – people are really excited about this,” Mr da Silva said.

“It’s like a ‘message in a bottle’ cast out into the stars. What’s interesting is not just whether there’s anyone listening, but what the public will say to intelligent life on another planet, given the opportunity.

“*Hello From Earth* is our way of showing that science can make the impossible possible. We have been to the Moon and now, we can speak to the stars.”

The *Hello From Earth* site is a National Science Week initiative of COSMOS and has been developed with the support of Questacon, CSIRO, NASA, and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) Post-Detection Committee of the International Academy of Astronautics.

National Science Week is Australia’s largest national festival. Now in its 12th year, the event celebrates the nation’s scientific achievements, creates awareness of the importance of science and encourages students to pursue a career in science.

The 2009 festival runs from 15-23 August and includes over 800 events Australia-wide.

“National Science Week is an opportunity for Australians of all ages to learn about the wonders of science in a fun and exciting way,” Senator Carr said.

“From schools, universities and research laboratories, to community libraries, town halls and local theatres, National Science Week celebrations will be accessible to everyone.”

National Science Week is proudly supported by the Australian Government and partners CSIRO, the Australian Science Teachers Association, the ABC and shac Communications.

More information about National Science Week events and initiatives is available at www.scienceweek.gov.au.

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Links to images/ animations

Artist's impression of the planetary system Gliese 581

High resolution still image

<http://bit.ly/CjQXy>

Illustration of Gliese 581 star system vs Earth’s solar system

High resolution still image

<http://bit.ly/dawsN>

Video animation of Gliese 581d, the target planet

Standard Definition, High Definition 720p25, and ultra High Definition 720p50.

<http://bit.ly/14uDLG>

Video animation of the star system Gliese 581, including the target planet

Standard Definition, High Definition 720p25, and ultra High Definition 720p50.

<http://bit.ly/E7tjl>