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Defence Innovation Secure Hub (DISH) Industry Day:

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

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Canada

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What We Heard

Background

What are the Defence Innovation Secure Hubs (DISH)?

A core feature of the [Bureau of Research, Engineering and Advanced Leadership in Innovation and Science \(BOREALIS\)](#) is the network of Defence Innovation Secure Hubs (DISH), which will establish and manage secure, mission-oriented innovation clusters that convene government, industry, academia, and other partners around priority capability challenges. The DISH will accelerate the development, integration, and transition of dual-use technologies into sovereign defence and security outcomes, while safeguarding sensitive research and intellectual property.

The recent establishment of the [pilot Maritime DISH](#) marks the beginning of a national network of secure, purpose-built spaces, where Canadian researchers and scientists and their trusted partners can co-develop, test, and validate emerging technologies requiring classified handling.

Building on the DISH Request for Information (RFI)

The DISH Industry Day was intended as a follow-on activity from the [DISH Request for Information \(RFI\)](#), which closed on October 14, 2025. Based on the results of the RFI, two priority mission areas were identified: (1) quantum and (2) uncrewed systems (UxS), which will guide future DISH sites.

Therefore, the goal of this engagement session was to bring together experts in both domains from across Canada to further build on the results of the RFI and inform the design of a DISH Call for Proposals (CFP) launching under the Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security (IDEaS) program in February 2026.

Bringing Stakeholders Together

The BOREALIS Joint Program Office (JPO) hosted the DISH Industry Day on January 21, 2026, from 13:00-16:30 at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, ON. The event brought together 327 participants (189 in person and 138 virtually) from industry, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and all levels of government.

The event began with opening remarks from Natasha Kim, Associate Deputy Minister, and Jaspinder Komal, ADM(DRDC), which underscored the current inflection point for defence innovation in Canada. The working portion of the event centered on three panel discussions that introduced the DISH concept, explored partnership and infrastructure models, and addressed stakeholder questions.

Summary of Key Discussions

Panel 1, Setting the Stage: Defence Innovation Secure Hubs

Speakers

Panelists:

- **Vincent Myers**, Maritime DISH Lead, BOREALIS
- **Adam Green**, Director, Research Security, Public Safety Canada
- **Ahmad Khorchid**, Director, R&D Innovation Operations, IDEaS program

Moderator:

- **Kate Kaminska**, Director General, BOREALIS

Overview

This panel focused on the significance and intended outcomes of the DISH initiative; the importance of security as an enabler for collaboration; as well as the IDEaS delivery framework for the upcoming DISH CFP. Participants were reminded that the CFP is still under development, and that stakeholder input will shape its final design. The DISH concept was presented as a network of secure, mission-driven innovation hubs that connect government, industry, and academia to accelerate defence-related R&D, reduce barriers to collaboration, and support the transition of technologies into operational use. Core principles include secure infrastructure capable of supporting classified work, a consortium-based governance model, and alignment with defence priorities through national oversight. Early lessons from the Maritime DISH pilot in Halifax have informed refinements to the upcoming CFP. The discussion also underscored the growing importance of research security across cyber, physical, personnel, and supply-chain domains, with expectations that applicants will align with federal frameworks and best practices. Updates to IDEaS authorities now enable larger, more complex initiatives and the ability to fund national-scale capabilities, integrated test ecosystems, secure research environments, and transition pathways. The DISH CFP will use non-repayable contribution agreements to support secure infrastructure and mission-oriented R&D programs in quantum and UxS, with multi-partner consortia, defined funding ranges (approximately \$50 million over two years), limits on infrastructure spending (no more than 50% of funding), and IP arrangements that preserve innovator ownership while granting the government a non-exclusive license.

Q&A Session

Q1 – Would receipt of transfer funds disqualify a company from receiving SR&ED tax credits or ITB Funding [i.e. how would the transfer payment interact with other government incentives]?

A1 – Canada's R&D tax system is still anchored by the scientific SR&ED program; however, several enhancements have been announced to make the program more generous, accessible, and aligned with innovation policy. Although contribution agreements may not offer the same tax benefits as traditional contracting, transfer payments were chosen deliberately as they provide greater flexibility and agility for setting up secure infrastructure and enabling rapid collaboration. While there are unique advantages of contracting, the DISH initiative requires a funding model that allows applicants more control and enables the government to co-invest efficiently.

Q2 – Is funding limited to the first two years, or will additional funding be available later?

A2 – The two-year funding window is deliberate and will allow government to assess how quickly the ecosystem can mobilize and support emerging defence needs. While there is no commitment to future funding, the door is not closed on this possibility. After the initial two years, the government will evaluate performance, readiness, and impact before determining whether additional support is warranted.

Q3 – Can funding be used for both infrastructure upgrades and R&D activities?

A3 – Yes, funding can be used for both infrastructure upfitting and R&D activities, and both are required. DISH sites must upgrade existing facilities to operate at Secret (Level 2), while also delivering R&D through these facilities. Up to 50% of requested funding may be used on infrastructure. To meet the ambitious timelines, R&D activities will likely have to begin even while infrastructure upgrades are underway, likely at the Unclassified level before eventually transitioning to Secret (Level 2) over the two-year period.

Q4 – How is the pilot Maritime DISH at COVE performing so far?

A4 – The Maritime DISH pilot is progressing well. It is led by DRDC Atlantic scientists who are closely tied to defence users, ensuring strong alignment with NORAD modernization S&T priorities. Although the Maritime DISH has only been operational for about three months, early results are promising. The partnership with COVE

has brought agility and valuable ecosystem knowledge. Lessons from this pilot are already informing the design of the national DISH model and the upcoming DISH CFP.

Q5 – Do applicants require security clearances prior to responding to the CFP?

A5 – No. Security clearances are not required at the proposal stage. However, clearance and screening measures will be required before any classified work begins.

Q6 – IDEaS CFPs often have short submission windows. Will potential respondents have sufficient time to draft their proposals for the DISH CFP?

A6 – Timelines will be short, in part because speed is a feature the government is explicitly testing through this model. However, given that the RFI was released in Fall 2025, stakeholders have already received a signal to begin preparing. Proposal requirements will be lightweight, not lengthy. The government also commits to fast decision-making to match the accelerated pace.

Q7 – How many proposals will be funded, and what is the total funding available?

A7 – The total funding envelope is approximately \$50 million for both quantum and UxS DISH sites. Only a small number of proposals will be funded within that envelope. Funding levels outlined in the session are guidelines only.

Q8 – Will the DISH support training for CAF members or research personnel?

A8 – This depends on the specifics of the challenge areas outlined in the CFP. Training can be part of proposals if aligned with the R&D plan.

Q9 – How is DISH positioned to respond to a changing geopolitical context, shifting global alliances and technological gaps?

A9 – Quantum and UxS were chosen given that Canada has distinct strengths in these areas and needs to protect and grow these ecosystems domestically. These domains are aligned with emerging defence needs and provide Canada a competitive advantage. However, they are not the only priority areas; more DISH CFPs will follow that are aligned with sovereign capabilities outlined in the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS).

Q10 – Will existing research security be part of the evaluation, or will research security be evaluated based on an ambition / plan?

A10 – Proposals must include a research security plan; however, secure facilities do not need to exist at the time of application. Instead, applicants must outline a credible plan to develop secure, accredited spaces within the two-year funding window. The expectation is to build secure capacity during the project – not before.

Q11 – Will applicants need to provide a long-term sustainment plan beyond the two-year funding window?

A11 – Yes. Proposals must include a sustainment plan describing how the DISH site and its activities will continue beyond the initial two years. The government wants to ensure long-term viability, though it is not prescribing a 20-year outlook. Funding beyond two years is neither promised nor ruled out.

Q12 – Will funding support both establishment of DISH sites and third-party R&D projects? Can work occur in existing secure facilities?

A12 – Funding is intended to support both the establishment and upfitting of the DISH site, as well as delivering R&D through the hub. If an applicant already has secure facilities, they may direct more funding toward R&D, but must still demonstrate inclusive access for partners, a consortium model, and how the facility will serve as a national DISH site. Infrastructure spending cannot exceed 50% of requested funds.

Q13 – Can universities lead proposals, given their strong research capacity and HQP training?

A13 – Yes. Universities are fully eligible to act as lead applicants. The program values university participation given their strengths in research, HQP development, and existing infrastructure. However, DISH sites must reflect strong industry-academia collaboration, since the end goal is delivering operational advantage to CAF, not conducting purely academic research.

Q14 – What Technological Readiness Level (TRL) is the CFP targeting?

A14 – TRL levels will vary by domain. For instance, quantum technologies may start at lower TRLs, while UxS may target higher TRLs. Overall, the intent is to advance TRLs toward operational use, not remain in early-stage exploratory research.

Q15 – Will certain functions be centralized across the network of DISH (for e.g., security screening, governance)?

A15 – Yes, potentially. The purpose of a national network is to enable shared governance, common processes, cross disciplinary learning, and possibly centralized administrative functions. It is expected that DISH sites will collaborate closely and avoid duplicating efforts, although specifics will depend on proposals.

Q16 – What are the long-term strategic considerations for future domains?

A16 – The upcoming DISH CFP is only the beginning. Over time, we expect to expand DISH into additional domains such as robotics, energetics, sensing, advanced materials, and critical minerals. Our long-term vision is to establish secure research environments across Canada, align future sites with NORAD modernization and Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) priorities, enable rapid prototyping and commercialization, and develop a strong pipeline of defence scientists and engineers.

Panel 2, Technical Briefing: Quantum

Speakers

Panelists:

- **Michel Dufour**, Innovation and Commercial Services Manager, Directorate Space Requirements, Director General Space, Combat & Support, Royal Canadian Air Force
- **Marc Chateaufneuf**, Senior Scientific Advisor, Valcartier Research Centre, DRDC
- **Boniface Yogendran**, Defence Scientist, Radar Sensing and Exploitation, Ottawa Research Centre, DRDC

Moderator:

- **Jeffrey Salvail**, Quantum DISH Lead, BOREALIS

Overview

This panel explored how a Quantum DISH could significantly enhance Canada's defence capabilities across multiple domains, with space highlighted as a key area where quantum sensing, secure communications, improved intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and advanced space-domain awareness could address emerging threats and operational gaps. The discussion emphasized that quantum is a deep enabling

technology rather than a standalone product, offering value only when it outperforms classical systems and can be demonstrated, integrated, and validated under real operational conditions. Priority areas included quantum-enhanced sensing, alternative navigation and timing systems, quantum computing for modelling and optimization, and secure quantum communications. The panel also underscored Canada's urgent need for next-generation sensing and radar capabilities, particularly in the North, given aging infrastructure. Quantum technologies were framed as a potential catalyst for a generational leap in defence innovation, provided they are developed within integrated systems and supported by robust testing and validation environments.

Q&A Session

Q1 – Can quantum technologies be used for submarine detection via magnetic anomaly detection?

A1 – Quantum magnetic anomaly detection (MAD) is a promising area. Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) is a recognized defence priority, and quantum-enabled magnetic sensing could significantly improve detection of undersea threats. This work aligns with both the quantum and maritime DISH activities, and stakeholders exploring these technologies are encouraged to consider the DISH initiative as a mechanism for advancement.

Q2 – How will the DISH collaborate with existing federal government labs that are already active in quantum radar (for e.g., DRDC Ottawa Research Centre)?

A2 – The DISH is designed to function as an ecosystem enabler, not a replacement for existing labs. DRDC will remain an anchor partner, however the DISH will help Canada operate at industry pace, accelerating transitions from research to capability. The DISH provides an integration environment, access to end users, and a bridge into operational requirements. Collaboration between DRDC teams and DISH sites is not only expected but central to the long-term model.

Q3 – How do quantum technologies tie into plans to upgrade and modernize Arctic sensors?

A3 – Quantum sensing aligns with NORAD modernization, which is a 20-year effort currently underway. NORAD has a dedicated S&T program focused on next generation sensing technologies. Quantum DISH activities are meant to complement and feed into this long-term modernization pipeline, enabling technologies that can be adopted as part of future Arctic surveillance architectures.

Q4 – What is the role of international collaboration in the quantum DISH?

A4 – This is a broader strategic question that will be explored as the DISH concept continues to evolve.

Q5 – Does Canada have domestic capability and supply chains to manufacture quantum hardware?

A5 – Canadian companies and research institutions are actively building quantum components and systems, and the DISH initiative is designed to leverage and expand this capacity. While strengths exist across several quantum technology areas, the maturity of supply chains differs by technology type, meaning our capabilities are strong in some areas and still developing in others.

Q6 – How does DISH align with Canada's ambition for domestic primes and long-term industrial sovereignty?

A6 – The CFP will not prescribe consortium structures. The DISH aims to catalyze innovation that could feed future defence procurements and offer pathways for Canadian firms to become system integrators. The government is looking for proposals that demonstrate strong, mission-focused partnerships – including those that strengthen Canadian industrial capability over time.

Q7 – Will the DISH be centralized or distributed, and what would success look like in 10 years?

A7 – Quantum capability is distributed across Canada, and the DISH model will reflect this. Applicants are encouraged to propose networked, multi-partner, multi-site solutions. As for the 10-year vision: success would mean a cohesive national ecosystem that identifies, integrates, and fields quantum-enabled technologies that gives CAF a decisive operational advantage.

Q8 – Given the two-year funding window, what constitutes research success for quantum?

A8 – Two years is a short timeline for quantum research, so success will not be defined by specific TRLs but by credible, mission driven progress. The emphasis is on delivering testable prototypes quickly rather than pursuing perfect solutions that arrive too late, with value placed on demonstrating real-world applicability. Integration and system level readiness are considered just as important as the performance of individual components.

Q9 – Will hybrid quantum-classical sensors be acceptable, given that pure quantum sensors may not be field-ready?

A9 – Yes. The DISH is not limited to purely quantum systems. A quantum enhanced sensor that provides meaningful operational advantage is acceptable. The objective is capability improvement, not adherence to strict definitions of “pure” quantum technology.

Q10 – How will different CAF branches coordinate their needs, given limited resources and divergent requirements?

A10 – BOREALIS provides the integration function across DND/CAF. While each service (Army, Navy, Air Force) has distinct needs, DISH sites and BOREALIS ensure cross branch visibility, collaboration, and joint prioritization to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure coherence across the enterprise.

Panel 3, Technical Briefing: Uncrewed Systems (UxS)

Speakers

Panelists:

- **Maj Matthew Harris**, Engagement Lead, MINERVA Initiative, Canadian Army
- **Maj Samuel Brisebois**, Director of Special Requirements 4 (C-)UAS, Canadian Special Operations Forces Command
- **LCol Nicolas Verreault**, Head of Joint Uncrewed Systems (UxS) Office, Chief of Combat Systems Integration, Canadian Joint Force Command

Moderator:

- **Mark Robbins**, DISH Director, BOREALIS

Overview

This panel explored why a dedicated UxS DISH is essential for Canada's defence posture and strategically urgent for delivering these capabilities at scale and with the agility modern warfare now requires. The discussion focused on how UxS are reshaping modern warfare and outlined the operational needs driving Canadian defence priorities across the Army, Special Operations Forces, and the Joint Force Command. This includes the explosive global growth and proliferation of UxS, the need for Canadian-made systems resilient to electronic warfare and harsh climates, and the importance of ease of use, modular open architectures, and rapid, iterative upgrade cycles. Participants emphasized the demand for higher-TRL, quickly fieldable systems, simplified networking, responsive supply models, improved power and endurance, and modular payload integration across air, land, and maritime domains. Lessons from Ukraine underscored both the value of extreme iteration speed and the risks of fragmented, non-interoperable fleets, reinforcing the need for cohesive architectures, trusted

supply chains, and clear policy frameworks for weaponization, autonomy, and counter-robotics. Overall, the panel highlighted that usability, interoperability, and rapid adaptation are essential to delivering UxS capabilities at the speed and scale required by contemporary conflict.

Q&A Session

Q1 – Why isn't "an empty farmer's field" sufficient for R&D testing? Why is the UxS DISH required?

A1 – Operational realities are contested and complex. Systems must be proven in degraded/denied Electronic Warfare (EW) environments across Arctic and maritime contexts and in explosives/testing ranges under controlled authorities. The UxS DISH should provide access to Secret (Level 2) facilities with approved frequency ranges; EW contested test environments (i.e., jamming/spoofing, radio frequency (RF) survey/selection); as well as arctic/sea environments and other live effects testing venues.

Q2 – Will the UxS DISH bridge R&D to CAF operational use and procurement?

A2 – The UxS DISH will serve as a central locus for testing, integration, and validation (including user trials), however procurement and fielding decisions remain with DND/CAF and BOREALIS governance. Not every DISH output will go straight to operations; end-users will decide on further trials and adoption. The aim is to reduce friction in the pathway from research lab to operational testing.

Q3 – How will CAF train at the speed required to onboard a full spectrum of UxS?

A3 – The Joint UxS Office is the functional authority for training standards, and current five-day basic courses are not enough to meet CAF's growing UxS requirements. To accelerate readiness, the CAF is expanding advanced Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) training with experienced industry instructors, adopting rotation-based models so units train on the systems they will deploy, and implementing 18–24-month refresh cycles. It is also investing in "smart FPV" technologies to reduce pilot error and cognitive load, while using Modular Open Systems Approach (MOSA) and fewer airframe types to streamline training demands. In parallel, CANSOFCOM is building cleared talent pipelines through partnerships with schools and initiatives such as DISH and BOREALIS.

Q4 – Will the UxS DISH offer a degraded/denied/EW test environment?

A4 – The UxS DISH will aim to provide a degraded, denied, and EW-contested test environment, subject to classification and policy constraints. Certain EW requirements are classified and will only be shared in secure settings, however the UxS DISH should enable RF environment awareness (such as spectrum surveys and channel-selection tools) and realistic jamming and spoofing that reflect operational threats. This environment will be created using a combination of DISH-provided and user-provided capabilities. At the same time, the CAF is aligning with U.S. chassis standards for specific EW sensor payloads, and Army demand for these capabilities is expected to increase as UxS systems proliferate.

Q5 – Can the DISH CFP requirements specify exactly what the UxS must do (CONOPS/outcomes) vs. basic specs?

A5 – Mission centric requirements drive real innovation, rather than basic technical specifications. This allows the CFP to define the operational outcomes the UxS DISH must achieve (for e.g., autonomous detect, track, identify, and target performance within a defined timeframe), while any sensitive EW details can be placed in a classified annex. The overall intent is to communicate the effects and timelines the CAF requires instead of focusing solely on parameters such as endurance or weight. In addition, policy updates are needed to ensure a single operator can legally perform both flight and effects tasks for certain sensors and payloads without requiring a second CAF member centric requirements drive-track-identify-target performance within a defined timeframe

Q6 – How will counter-UxS be handled within the UxS DISH?

A6 – The UxS DISH will treat counter-UxS as a core component of its mission by providing modern EW-contested environments where both UxS and counter-UxS systems can be tested under realistic conditions. It will enable demonstrations of jammers, interceptors, and multi-modal sensors (for e.g., acoustic, infrared, visual, magnetic, and EW) against representative targets. The approach emphasizes integration and plug-and-play architectures so small units can employ lightweight, portable, and effective counter-UxS tools without large specialist teams. CANSOFCOM will also continue to rely on speed, surprise, and concealment as primary defensive measures while adapting doctrine for dynamic, low-signature operations.

Q7 – Is there a plan to ensure Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E) covers multidomain threats (UGV/USV, not just UAS)?

A7 – Yes. The RDT&E plan will address multidomain threats by ensuring that testing and development extend beyond aerial systems to include ground and maritime robotic threats. The UxS DISH is intended to operate across all relevant domains, enabling crewed-uncrewed teaming, hybrid concepts, and counter robotics-robotics capabilities.

Q8 – How will CAF manage policy gaps (for e.g., lethal effects, autonomy, domestic use)?

A8 – The CAF acknowledges that existing ammunition and explosive policies do not fully address the use of autonomous or lethal UxS, and work is underway to close these gaps. The government is examining risk-based approval processes, cyber assurance measures, and supply chain trust models to ensure these systems can be employed safely and lawfully. Updated policy will be required to define appropriate roles and authorities for operators, and any classified elements of this work will be handled through secure channels, assurance measures, and supply-chain trust models to ensure these systems can be employed safely and lawfully.

Q9 – How can industry align with training and sustainment realities?

A9 – Industry can best align with CAF training and sustainment needs by designing UxS that are easy to operate, reduce cognitive load, and minimize training demands. Systems should follow MOSA principles to lower integration and sustainment costs, and they should support rapid refresh and just-in-time surge rather than relying on large stockpiles. Industry should also focus on improving power and endurance and ensure that effects related capabilities are developed with awareness of range certification, legal requirements, and other policy considerations to speed adoption.

Next Steps

On behalf of the BOREALIS JPO, we extend our sincere thanks to all participants for the exceptional level of engagement throughout these discussions. The depth, clarity, and thoughtfulness of stakeholder questions reflect a community deeply committed to strengthening Canada's defence innovation ecosystem. These insights will directly inform the continued evolution of the DISH initiative, and we encourage stakeholders to carry this momentum forward in preparation for the upcoming DISH CFP launching in February 2026.

This is only the beginning for BOREALIS. In the months ahead, there will be many more opportunities for engagement, collaboration, and co-creation as we work together to advance this national effort. Now is the time to refine partnerships, sharpen concepts, and position industry and academia partners to contribute meaningfully to what comes next.