



MEDIA RELEASE

Object detected west of Alice Springs

For immediate release: 23 October 2008

Geoscience Australia has confirmed that sightings of flashing lights in the sky and loud bangs heard last Friday night near Wallace Rockhole, west of Alice Springs, was most probably a meteorite (or bolide) crashing through the Earth's atmosphere.

The object was detected on the infrasound station near Tennant Creek, where two distinct signals were recorded at 6:51pm and 6:53pm on Friday 17 October 2008. This infrasound station is managed by the Research School of Earth Sciences at the Australian National University.

Meteors and other objects frequently collide with the Earth's upper atmosphere, and are often seen as 'shooting stars'. If large enough, they will penetrate deep into the atmosphere before burning up – these are commonly observed as a bright streak of light coupled with a thunderous rumble as the meteor disintegrates.

"The presence of two signals indicates that the object may have broken into at least two pieces as it travelled through the atmosphere," said Dr. Matthew Purss, a geophysicist at Geoscience Australia.

There have been two prominent meteors that have been detected on the infrasound network near or over the Australian mainland during the past five years; one near Taree, NSW, in December 2004 and one near Christmas Island, WA, in December 2006.

"It is less common for these objects to impact on the Earth's surface to form impact craters. Central Australia is ideal for preserving impact craters due to the arid environment, dry weather conditions and sparse population. The Alice Springs region is host to a number of well known prehistoric meteorite impact craters, such as Gosses Bluff, Huckitta and Henbury craters", said Dr Purss.

For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact:
Geoscience Australia 24 hour Media Hotline 1800 882 035