

NASA Advisory Council Subcommittee Recommendation

Subcommittee Name: Planetary Science

Chair: Sean Solomon

Date of Public Deliberation: 2-3 October 2008

Date of Transmission to Science Committee: 9 October 2008

Short title of the proposed Recommendation

Lessons learned from the MSL cost increases.

Short description of proposed Recommendation

PSS recommends that, at the earliest appropriate time, NASA conduct an external review to assess the causes of the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) cost overruns and to recommend those changes to cost estimation procedures and project management needed to prevent similar situations for future missions.

Major reasons for proposing the Recommendation

The history of multiple major increases to mission cost for MSL is a poor model for future missions, particularly at the flagship scale, and it is important that the causes of recurring cost growth be understood so that lessons learned can be applied henceforth. That said, an immediate inquiry into these issues would not be wise, inasmuch as the individuals most knowledgeable are also those most needed to ensure that MSL completes development and testing and proceeds to launch.

Consequences of no action on the proposed Recommendation

In the absence of this recommendation, there exists a grave risk that the next flagship mission – to the Jupiter or Saturn system – will face a similar course of cost overruns.