

The 68th Meeting of the Council of the ASA

The 68th Meeting of the Council was held at the University of Sydney on 21 November 1995. The meeting opened with the approval of two more private observatories for addition to the list of ASA 'designated' observatories for protection from obtrusive lighting. Other continuing agenda items were discussed, including the question of Aboriginal names on Venus. Another letter had been written to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs seeking clarification of the status of several suggested names. One name had already been provisionally applied to a valley on Venus. The name of Louise Webster (Turtle) had also been nominated.

The Council approved a list of 16 new members, including the first Associate member. Two further students were awarded \$300 each to support their travel to overseas conferences. Other Executive business included a report on an upcoming lecture tour by Prof. Richard Ellis.

Following a brief Treasurer's report, the Editor tabled a report from the Editorial Board with a recommendation to accept papers on astronomy education for PASA which was accepted. The report also outlined options for acceptance of papers from conferences and workshops. The Council decided to differentiate in charges between local and international meetings, although the volume of material in either case was to remain less than a full issue. Finally the progress of negotiations with CSIRO for publication of PASA was reviewed. The contract had been re-drafted, but negotiations were continuing.

The report on the 1995 AGM/ASM was tabled and plans for the 1996 AGM/ASM and the Harley Wood School discussed. Planning of the Harley Wood School on the Indian-Pacific train was reported and was well advanced. The report of the Education subcommittee featured a notification from the Chair, John Dawe, of his intention to resign. Council decided to ask Alan Wright to take over as Chair of the subcommittee.

The President reported on an approach from the AIP suggesting that they supply all future representatives for the relevant FASTS Group representative. This was strongly opposed by the Council. A proposal from the Acoustical Society for a more equitable nomination scheme was supported.

Council resolved that all Full members would be invited by email to apply for the new grade of fellow of the ASA (FASA). A subcommittee was formed to establish guidelines for acceptance and recommend a list of members to be made Fellows. Finally, a report was tabled describing the state of astronomy and astronomy education in Vietnam. Council resolved to underwrite the cost of a small number of books and to approach the membership for further donations.

The 69th Meeting of the Council of the ASA

The 69th Meeting of the Council was held at the University of Sydney on 26 February 1996. The meeting opened with discussion of several topics which had been on-going agenda items. The Council approved several more new members and heard a report on the acceptance of the first 66 Fellows of the ASA. The list of Fellows and guidelines setting a high level of prestige for the grade had been previously distributed by email.

Brief reports were received from the Treasurer and Editor. The President announced that Michelle Storey had agreed to take the position as Editor when Jenny Nicholls relinquished it at the AGM. Also the new contract with CSIRO had now been signed.

The President reported on the status of the Harley Wood School. Unfortunately suitable arrangements with Australian National Railways had proved impossible and the use of the Indian-Pacific train had been abandoned. An alternative venue in Perth had been arranged.

The President's report on the National Committee for Astronomy included a report on the outcome of the Major National Research Funding (MNRF) applications. The ATNF upgrade had been funded but not Australian membership in ESO. The government had indicated that it would support ESO membership through another funding mechanism.

Other business included the usual reports from the Donovan Trust and the Macquarie Foundation. A report was also received describing a very successful series of talks in capital cities around the country by Richard Ellis in November and December. The ASA had co-sponsored the series.

The 70th Meeting of the Council of the ASA

The 70th Meeting of the Council was held at the University of Sydney on 12 June 1996. This was several weeks before the Annual Scientific Meeting in Perth.

Several on-going matters were discussed first, notably the lack of any satisfactory response from the appropriate Minister regarding the use of Aboriginal names on Venus. Also a new representative was required for the ASA on the Standards Australia committee concerned with Obtrusive Lighting, since John Dawe was no longer able to fulfil this function. Other business included the selection of a new Public Officer for the Society since John Norris was going overseas. Mike Bessell had agreed to fill this role. The Council approved 10 new members and decided to have a membership certificate designed.

The Treasurer presented his report and the draft report for the AGM. The Society's financial position was very healthy with a surplus of over \$9000 and a balance over \$100,000.

The Editor reported on the status of PASA. Volume 13 was expected to comprise almost 300 pages, which justified the move to three issues in the volume. Changes to the PASA web pages by CSIRO Publishing were discussed and it was agreed that CSIRO should control these pages under ASA supervision.

Reports on plans for the 1996 AGM/ASM and the Harley Wood School were presented. The organisation of the Harley Wood School at its new location in Perth had been taken on by a committee of students from various institutions and was well in hand.

The President's report on the National Committee for Astronomy (NCA) focussed on the new Federal government's decision to terminate discussions concerning Australian membership of ESO. The ASA, the NCA, the Academy of Science and the Sydney Association for Astrophysics (SAfA) had all issued press releases regretting this decision. A letter from over 80 ASA members appeared in the national press and *New Scientist*, while various other members commented in the media. NCA efforts to secure Australian access to large optical/IR telescopes continued. The media effort prompted by the ESO decision and a letter from a member led to a debate on how the ASA should best interact with the media to maximise the visibility of astronomy.

The 30th Annual General Meeting of the ASA

The 30th Annual General Meeting of the ASA was held during the Society's Annual Scientific Meeting. The Scientific Meeting was sponsored by Perth Observatory in its Centenary year and held from 1 to 4 July 1996 at Alexander Library in Perth. A total of 106 people attended, of whom 42 were postgraduate students and 12 were non-ASA members.

The Scientific Meeting featured 53 verbal papers and around 48 poster papers. The prize for best student talk went to Andrew Walsh from the University of New South Wales, while the student poster prize went to Daya Rawson from Mount Stromlo Observatory. The Bok Prize for an undergraduate project completed in 1995 was awarded to Lisa Kewley from the University of Adelaide, who presented a talk on her work during the meeting.

The Harley Wood lecture was delivered one evening during the meeting by Russell Cannon, Director of the Anglo-Australian Observatory. His talk, entitled 'How Old are the Stars?', attracted a large public audience and was broadcast across Western Australia via satellite. The 1996 Harley Wood School was held from 27 to 30 June at the Point Walter conference centre near Perth. The original site for the School was to be the Indian-Pacific train as it travelled from Sydney to Perth. Unfortunately this plan was ultimately abandoned and a committee of students stepped forward to organise the School in Perth. The theme was 'Stars: Life, Death and the Galaxy' and it was attended by 60 people, including 46 students from all over Australia.

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on July 3. Copies of several reports were circulated to members. The President reported the award of \$11 million to the Australia Telescope National Facility (ATNF) under the Major National Research Facilities (MNRF) Program. The proposal for Australian Membership of the European Southern Observatory (ESO) was not funded by the MNRF program. Subsequently, the new Australian government broke off negotiations with ESO for financial reasons and the ASA was among those organisations which issued press releases regretting this decision.

The President outlined the process which resulted in over 60 members being accepted for the new grade of Fellow of the ASA (FASA). Several members had also joined at the new grade of Associate membership. Several awards to individuals were also noted, including Honorary Life Membership to Doug Milne, election as a fellow of the Australian Academy of Science to Michael Dopita, and the award of the Order of Australia for their services to Astronomy to Bob Frater and Ben Gascoigne. Also noted was the award of the Berenice Page Medal for excellence in amateur astronomy in Australia to Peter Williams of the Sutherland Astronomical Society.

The Treasurer reported that the Society had 357 members of all types at the time of the meeting. 1995-96 had resulted in a surplus of \$9000 which was considerably higher than expected. This was due to a profit from the 1995 Annual Scientific Meeting, together with several other factors. Estimates for the 1996-97 financial year predicted a loss of over \$5000, largely because of increased support of student travel overseas and for the high 1996 costs of student travel to the Perth Harley Wood School. Given the healthy reserves of the Society, the Treasurer regarded this as acceptable and recommended that fees and discounts remained unchanged.

The Editor's report began by describing the status of the issues in volumes 13 and 14 of the *Publications of the Astronomical Society of Australia* (PASA). The low number of submissions from the 1995 Scientific Meeting compared to the previous year was noted, however the number of unsolicited submissions remained steady. The Editor raised the

question of PASA going electronic and further discussion of electronic publication followed the General Meeting in a special session. Finally the Editor noted that she had completed her two year term and was passing the Editor's job to Michelle Storey.

As usual, the outgoing Council had made nominations for each position on the Council for 1996-97. Since there was a nomination from the membership for a position as Councillor, a postal ballot was conducted. The newly elected Council consisted of the following members:

President:	Dr E M Sadler
Vice President	Dr R W Clay
Treasurer	Dr D K Milne
Secretaries	Dr M L Duldig Dr J W O'Byrne
Councillors	Dr M S Bessell Dr R N Manchester Dr M M Mazzolini Dr S G Ryan Dr C H Smith

Dr Roy Allen remained as Donovan Trust Representative and Dr Michelle Storey took over as Editor. A transfer was also required in the position as the Society's Public Officer. This position had been accepted previously by Dr Michael Bessell.

Special Meeting to discuss PASA

A special meeting was held immediately after the Annual General Meeting to discuss the *Publications of the Astronomical Society of Australia* (PASA) and a possible move to electronic publication.

The meeting was chaired by the new Editor, Dr Michelle Storey, who began by outlining the status of PASA. With volume 13, the journal had expanded to three issues per year with a total of about 300 pages. Some 320 copies went to ASA members, with a further 210 to institutional subscribers. The PASA home page and the Astrophysics Data System (ADS) listed titles, authors and abstracts of recent issues and the ADS had just scanned in the full text of ASA papers from 1975 to 1993. It was emphasised that PASA needs the best electronic access so that searchers can find PASA papers as readily as those from any other journal.

Several *advantages* that PASA offers Australian astronomers were pointed out. Among them :

- PASA is our journal and serves as an important record of historical papers, education papers, Ph.D. abstracts etc.
- Australian astronomers are relatively isolated from each other. PASA helps us to stay informed.
- PASA has a strong tradition of publishing papers presented at the ASA's Annual Scientific Meeting. In particular this encourages students to publish regularly.
- PASA provides a forum to publish instrumentation and computing papers.
- PASA has no page charges.

- ASA members have firmly indicated that they want PASA to continue.

PASA also has several *disadvantages* for Australian astronomers:

- PASA costs the ASA money to produce, although it is cheaper than simply paying the corresponding page charges for Ap.J.
- How do we justify having our own journal when not many other small countries do?
- Clearly the major problem is that PASA is not readily available to overseas astronomers, so papers published in PASA are not often cited. The move to electronic access will help overcome this problem.

Several options were presented for the future of PASA. Essentially these reduced to maintaining the status quo or improving electronic access. Full text on ADS one year after publication was expected very soon, but PASA itself could also provide full text of papers on the Web, with appropriate links, immediately after acceptance. It was noted that surveys by major journals indicate that readers still prefer paper copies.

Having completed this outline, the Editor asked the audience for their views.

It was clear that most people supported a move to rapid electronic publication of the fully refereed text of papers. It provided a means of overcoming the relatively low visibility of PASA. However it was also noted that maintaining the subscription base was essential because electronic publication would be no cheaper than a paper copy of a journal and many people (but not all!) believe that a paper copy is still necessary. As a result, ADS has agreements with other journals for a one year delay between paper publication and providing the full paper electronically.

The question was raised of how fast electronic access could be provided and how access could be maintained in the long term. Experience with the ATNF pre-print server emphasised the need for mirror sites of US servers and for them to mirror our servers. It also showed that there were many problems with different formats in submitted text which were always very labour-intensive to correct. It would be better if a large organisation with expertise and a commitment to archiving were involved in the production of an electronic PASA. The ephemeral nature of electronic archives because of changing hardware and standards was a concern.

It was unclear how fast an electronic version of PASA could be established although it was noted that CSIRO Publishing was trying to get the Australian Journal of Chemistry onto the Web.

The Editor closed the discussion noting that a move to electronic publication was clearly supported by the members present, perhaps in some innovative way, and it would be the subject of on-going discussion.

Reported by John O'Byrne