

ASA - Mollymook - July 1-3, 2002

President's Report

This has been a busy year for the ASA. For most members, the main Society activity is the ASM and Harley Wood Winter School. For Council, and especially the Officers of the Society, assisting with the organisation IAU General Assembly, to be held at Darling Harbour next year, has been a major concern and commitment. I will come back to that later.

The Society is in a healthy position, both with membership and financially. Current membership is 382, including 71 Fellows, 73 student members and 6 Corporate members. There has been a modest increase in membership over past couple of years. It was especially pleasing to sign membership certificates for 8 or 9 new student members this year. Our Treasurer, Bruce Dawson, will describe the finances in his report, to be given shortly.

A sad duty I must perform is to acknowledge the deaths of four Society members this year:

Robert Hanbury Brown had a distinguished career in astronomy, and was Professor in the School of Physics, Sydney University, for many years. He was best known for his pioneering development of intensity and coherent stellar interferometers, leading to SUSI at Narrabri.

Kevin Westfold was also distinguished, with research interests in theoretical astrophysics. He was an Honorary Fellow of the Society, a member of Council for several years, and President of the Society for 1975-76.

Ken Sims had a long career as an astronomer at Sydney Observatory, commencing there in 1951 and retiring in 1982. He was also a long-time member of the Society.

Finally, just a month or so ago, Jim O'Mara, recently retired from the University of Queensland, died while holidaying in Europe. Jim was also a long time member of the ASA who served on Council, and whose research in stellar spectroscopy was well respected.

I ask you all to stand in silence for a moment in memory of these people.

The ASA awards a number of prizes:

David Allen Prize - for promotion of astronomy in the media. We expect this to be awarded later this year.

Charlene Heisler Prize - to reward excellence at the undergraduate level. There will be no award this year, and we are re-assessing the terms of the award.

Bok Prize, for excellence in an undergraduate, usually Honours, thesis. The announcement of opportunity was a little late this year, only one nomination was received and no award was made.

Page Medal - to recognise skill and dedication by amateur astronomers - awarded this year to the Reynolds Amateur Photometry Team, Canberra. This team has made many thousands of observations of variable stars, resulting in a significant number of publications.

These prizes are largely supported by donations to the Foundation for Advancement of Astronomy, which are tax deductible. The FAA currently has slightly less than \$50K in funds - not enough to fully support the prizes and its other activities. So if any of you would like to support the promotion of astronomy in Australia, we would welcome further donations.

Another major role of the Society to which we commit nearly half of our income is our journal, PASA. PASA is currently undergoing major changes with the transition to electronic publication. This is a significant challenge, especially for our Managing Editor, Michelle Storey, and our publishers, CSIRO Publishing. I am sure that this form of publication is going to become much more common in the future, and PASA is in the vanguard of this development. I'm pleased to be able to report that subscriptions are coming in at about their usual rate. The success of PASA depends on the publication of good papers. I urge you all to submit such papers to PASA. It offers quick publication - after refereeing and acceptance, papers will typically be available on the web in 4-5 weeks and listed on ADS about 3 weeks later. Many PASA papers are highly cited and the trend of the mean citation index is up. Let's keep it that way!

As I mentioned earlier, one of the main concerns of the Society this year has been the organisation of the 25th General Assembly of the IAU, to be held at Darling Harbour, 13-26 July 2003. Harry Hyland introduced planning for the GA on Monday.

The ASA is involved in a number of ways - with the NCA it set up the National Organising Committee, the body responsible for the local organisation of the GA in collaboration with the conference organisers ICMS Australasia. Most of the members of the NOC are ASA members, with Harry Hyland and John Whiteoak co-chairing the Committee. After some initial difficulties, now largely overcome, the NOC and ICMS are now working well, with planning for the GA proceeding apace.

Most importantly perhaps, the ASA is the body financially responsible for the IAU-GA organisation. Darling Harbour is a wonderful venue, but it is expensive - the total budget for the GA is about \$2M. The ASA itself does not have large reserves, and the various astronomy institutions contributed to a "float" to give the NOC working capital. The budget requires about three-quarters of the \$2M to be recouped from registration fees, so as Harry stressed on Monday, it is absolutely essential that the attractions of the GA, both scientific and social, be widely advertised, especially to our overseas colleagues.

The budget also contains a sponsorship target of \$350K. It was clear late last year that this sponsorship program was not working well. This was a serious situation since, if this money (or most of it) is not raised, the Society may be bankrupted. It was clear that a dedicated person was needed to lead this effort, and the ASA Council resolved to spend nearly half of its reserves, \$55K, to employ such a person. David Ellyard accepted this role, and is working 3 days a week to promote the GA and obtain sponsorship. If the GA is financially successful, we (and the other institutions) will recoup their investment, possibly with interest.

The GA promises to be an exciting event. We have heard of some of the plans for associated activities. There are six Symposia on leading areas of current astrophysics, 21 Joint Discussions, 3 Invited Discourses, and other workshops. Many of you will be asked to help with the organisation over the coming months. I urge you to give some time to this and to help make this the "Best General Assembly Ever".

Finally, I would like to thank the ASA Council for their efforts which keep the Society as successful as it is. Especially, I would like to recognise the efforts of the Secretaries, John O'Byrne and Marc Duldig, and the Treasurer, Bruce Dawson. All of these people put a lot of effort into the successful functioning of the Society and they deserve our thanks.

Dick Manchester
President.
July 3, 2002.