



ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Incorporated in the ACT

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND, 6th JULY 2004

1. International Astronomical Union XXVth General Assembly

It is almost exactly one year since Australia successfully staged the XXVth General Assembly of the IAU at the spectacular Darling Harbour Convention Centre in Sydney. I am sure we all have wonderful memories from the GA. The ASA was invited by the IAU Executive to stage the Assembly and we assumed the financial responsibility as well as a major organisational role in this most important astronomical event, which included 6 Symposia, more than 20 Joint Discussions and other meetings, business and scientific sessions for the IAU Divisions and Commissions, the General Assembly itself, the associated social and educational events and the Astro-Expo, which were all held concurrently over two weeks.

A very large number of ASA Members made an outstanding contribution to the organisation of this celebration of astronomical achievements and I would like to thank everyone for their amazing efforts. In particular, the NOC and the other Organising Committees, the large number of students who helped in a myriad of ways, the people who organised the public and educational outreach, and the numerous helpers who worked tirelessly in hidden support roles. I would like to especially acknowledge the contribution of Dick Manchester, John Whiteoak, Harry Hyland, John O'Byrne, Ron Ekers, Rachel Webster, Bruce Dawson, Raymond Haynes, Bruce Peterson, Vince McIntyre, Shaun Amy, Nick Lomb, Michael Burton, Tamara Davis, Bill Zealey and Helen Sim. To those of you whom I may have neglected to name, my apologies. Your assistance was greatly appreciated. We must also give great credit to Lee Christopher and the staff at ICMS, who were the conference organisers, for the success of the staging of this large event.

Despite the many anxious moments we had over the risk of financial shortfall, it is now clear that there will be a modest surplus after all costs and float monies are repaid. Following a proposal from the NCA, we have been charged with establishing an independent Working Group to consult widely within the Australian astronomical community and to make a recommendation to the ASA Council on how we can make the most effective, equitable and appropriate use of these funds, which will be approximately \$60,000. The ASA Council has proposed Gordon Robertson (Chair), Ron Ekers, Tamara Davis, Paul Francis be the members of the group to prepare recommendations within the next six months.

2. Astronomical Society of Australia Membership

We have currently 403 members, which has been steady over the past year. This figure includes 17 students who have just been accepted and we are very pleased to welcome them into the ASA. It is also a pleasure to report that the Swinburne Centre for Astrophysics and Supercomputing has been accepted as a corporate member and we thank them for their ongoing support. We have also approved the acceptance of a new Fellow of the ASA, Peter Quinn of ESO. There are fewer than 10% of the Membership who are presently Fellows of the Society (not counting Honorary and retired Fellows), but there are many senior and distinguished astronomers in our community who would be eligible. Consequently, the Council will be inviting a number of these astronomers over the next few months to consider becoming Fellows of the ASA, in recognition of their contribution to the discipline.

There have also been sad losses to our membership over the past year and it is with great regret that I record the passing of Bob Duncan, who had a long and distinguished career at the Australia Telescope National Facility. Bob had retired but was still a very active researcher and his untimely death was a shock to his many friends and colleagues. He contributed much to the field of stellar astrophysics, particularly active stars. We also report that the death occurred late last year of one of radio astronomy's great pioneers, Harry Minnett, who was a participant in many of the early exciting discoveries. Harry was one of the founding fathers of Australian radio astronomy.

3. PASA Progress and Impact Factor

It has been a very successful year for the PASA journal, with the Impact Factor a very creditable 1.057, as measured by the JCR Journal Citation. This is the highest citation rating ever achieved by PASA and we look forward to increasing our ranking under the stewardship of CSIRO Publishing. The ASA has just signed a further two year contract, for a cost to the ASA of \$30,800 per year. This is a substantial sum, but is a consequence of needing to return a modest profit annually. We would like to thank Louise Hartley for her achievements as the new Managing Editor and John Lattanzio for his effective leadership as the Chair of the PASA Editorial Advisory Committee.

4. AIP Congress 2005

The astronomical community has been invited to participate in the AIP Congress to be held in Canberra from Jan 31 to Feb 4, 2005. A session dedicated to Solar Astrophysics is scheduled and the current Director of the European Southern Observatory, Catherine Cesarsky, will be a Plenary Speaker. We would like to encourage members to attend the Congress, which is being held in the International Year of Physics, marking a 100 years since Einstein's fundamental contributions to physics.

5. Academy of Science & the NCA

The ASA would like to offer warm congratulations to Matthew Colless on his election to the Australian Academy of Science this year. It is excellent that astronomy has another member of this prestigious association.

The NCA is a committee of the Academy. This year the NCA has the responsibility to begin preparation for the Decadal Review, which will be published in 2005. This important document sets a blueprint for the future priorities for Australian Astronomy as well as giving a census and evaluation of our current status and impact. The Working Groups and sub-Committees to undertake the collation of data and drafting of the document are to be established shortly.

6. PMSEIC Presentation in June, 2004

An opportunity became available to make a presentation to the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Committee in June, 2004. A Working Group comprising Brian Boyle, Penny Sackett, Matthew Bailes, John Storey, Mike Sargeant, Bob Frater and Martin Cole (Chair) sought input from the astronomical community and prepared, with very little time, a document outlining our status and impact. PMSEIC is an important forum to catch the attention of the Prime Minister and we must ensure we are able to determine the priorities for future research initiatives in astronomy. Our appreciation is extended to the Working Group for their efforts on our behalf.

7. New Directors for the ATNF and AAO

Our two major national Facilities have appointed new Directors within the last year. We congratulate both Brian Boyle, Director ATNF and Matthew Colless, Director AAO on their new positions and assure them of the cooperation and support from the ASA in promoting and encouraging astronomy.

8. ANITA Steering Committee

The President of the ASA was very pleased to accept the invitation to join the Steering Committee of ANITA, which will strengthen the links with the theoretical astrophysics community. There have been regular meetings of the Steering Committee and ANITA have been active in organising several scientific workshops over the past year.

9. Ellery Lectureship for 2003

It is my great pleasure to report that the 2003 Ellery Lectureship has been awarded to Don Melrose. This is the ASA's most prestigious Prize, awarded to a distinguished Australian Astronomer and Don joins a select group of our most notable researchers. The Lectureship was not given last year, because of the packed schedule for the IAU GA, which meant we did not hold our annual

ASM. The award is normally made every 2 years. The title of Don's keynote speech to the present ASM was "Maser Emission in Astrophysical Plasmas".

10. Harley Wood Lecture for 2004

The ASA sponsors the annual Harley Wood Public Lecture, which was inaugurated in honour of the first President of the ASA, who was also the Director of the Sydney Observatory for more than 30 years. It is important to choose exciting speakers who will enhance the existing strong appeal that astronomy has for the wider community. As the 2004 Harley Wood lecturer, Matthew Colless presented a stimulating lecture entitled "Surveying the Universe."

11. Bok Prize 2004

The Bok Prize is awarded annually for excellence in an undergraduate student project or report. It is customarily awarded to the best Honours Thesis, as judged by the ASA. This year the Prize is awarded to Stanislav Shabala of the University of Tasmania, for his thesis entitled "On The Evolution of Hill Regions." Our thanks to Brad Gibson for undertaking the difficult but rewarding task of assessing the nine excellent reports submitted this year. It is encouraging that we have so many outstanding young astronomers in training.

12. Page Medal 2004

This Medal was set up to acknowledge outstanding contribution from an amateur astronomer. This year the Page Medal is awarded to Colin Bembrick for his substantial contribution in the field of photometric observations of minor planets. The Medal was presented at the National Australian Convention of Amateur Astronomers in Hobart earlier this year.

13. Education and Public Outreach Committee (EPOC)

This Committee has been ably chaired for some time by Nick Lomb, Curator of the Sydney Observatory. The committee was responsible for running the very successful Associated Events schedule at the IAU General Assembly. Almost 30,000 people attended the various events, which were supported in part by the Donovan Trust and the British Council. One of the major ongoing contributions of the EPOC is the provision of factsheets for astronomical events. The most recent ones have been prepared by Nick Lom and Martin George and are an excellent resource, available through the Australian Astronomy web portal. In particular, Factsheet 15 on the Transit of Venus, an event of historical and astronomical significance, has been widely quoted in the media. We congratulate Nick and his Committee on their efforts.

14. Science Meets Parliament 2003

The President attended the Science Meets Parliament event in Canberra, October, 2003. Over 200 scientists attended and were briefed comprehensively on their scheduled appointments with a number of Federal politicians. The interactions are potentially extremely valuable in raising the awareness of our elected representatives to issues concerning Science. There were six astronomers present. One of the most exciting events was a breakfast meeting organised between the politicians and a selected number of young scientists.

15. ASA Council for 2004-2005

Our dedicated Treasurer of the past five years, Bruce Dawson, is stepping down. We are sad to see him leave but would like to thank him enormously for his contribution. Maria Hunt from UNSW has generously volunteered to take over as Treasurer and we warmly welcome her to the position. This led to a vacancy on the Council and we are very pleased to announce that David Blair from the University of Western Australia has been elected unopposed to the Council. I would like to thank the present Councillors for their valued contribution and congratulate Maria and David on their new positions. I would also like to thank Vicky Safouris for her contribution as our Student Representative. May I remind you that the Council Members for the following 12 months are:

Anne Green - President
Gary Da Costa – Vice President
Dick Manchester – Immediate Past President
John O’Byrne – Secretary
Marc Duldig –Secretary
Maria Hunt – Treasurer
Matthew Colless – Councillor
Michael Drinkwater - Councillor
Brad Gibson – Councillor
Paul Cally – Councillor
David Blair – Councillor
Vicky Safouris – Student Member
John Lattanzio – Chair, Editorial Advisory Committee

16. ASA ASM/AGM 2005

Following discussions at the recent Council Meeting we are very pleased to announce that the Annual Science Meeting and Annual General Meeting of the ASA for 2005 will be held July 4 – 8, to be organised by the University of Sydney. Venues are yet to be decided and we are seeking volunteers from the staff and students for assistance. The Harley Wood Winter School will precede the ASM/AGM and suggestions for a theme and a location are welcome!

Finally, it remains for me to thank Michael Drinkwater, Kevin Pimbblet and the hard-working members of the SOC and LOC for their organisation of the present Meeting. We have still two days to run, but it has been a most successful Meeting so far and I expect the Conference Dinner and remaining talks to be equally enjoyable and interesting. Our thanks also to Marianne Doyle and her Committee for organising a terrific Harley Wood Winter School in Coolangatta, with the theme “From our Sun to the Milky Way and Beyond”.

Anne J. Green
July 7, 2004