



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY, 6th JULY 2005

1. **Decadal Plan for Astronomy 2006 – 2015**

An event that has occupied many astronomers for the past year is the gathering of information for, and the preparation of, the Report of the Plan for Astronomy for the next 10 years. This task was foreshadowed at the 2004 Annual Science Meeting and I would like to thank and congratulate the Working Group Chairs, their Committees, the Editorial Board and the NCA for their combined effort and commitment in bringing this process towards a successful conclusion. The Report, currently in draft form, documents the status and achievements of our community and provides a blueprint for the decade to come. The Draft Plan will be launched at an informal Reception this evening and will be discussed in a Session during the current Annual Science Meeting. The ASA offered to underwrite the costs of the enterprise, but we are pleased to acknowledge that the Australian Research Council has agreed to provide \$50k in support of the process.

The National Committee for Astronomy has carriage of the process involved in producing this Report, which will be used by Government and other bodies when considering the goals and aspirations of astronomers. If we are to have a say in the future of our discipline, it is essential we endorse a coherent plan.

2. **International Astronomical Union XXVth General Assembly**

Two years on since Australia successfully staged the XXVth General Assembly of the IAU at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre in Sydney and the Auditor's Report on the financial statement is still not yet finalised, although it is almost to the sign-off point. This process has taken an extraordinary amount of time and effort and particular thanks go to our Previous President, Dick Manchester, and our Treasurer, Maria Cunningham, as well as many from the original organising Committees. The Final Report from the General Assembly is now on the web, linked from the ASA and ATNF pages. We owe considerable thanks for this report to co-Chair of the LOC, John Whiteoak.

Despite the many anxious moments we had over the risk of financial shortfall, we have known since last year that there will be a modest surplus. The ASA Council was charged with establishing an independent Working Group to consult widely within the Australian astronomical community and to then prepare a Report for the ASA Council to help us determine the most effective, equitable and appropriate use of these funds, which will be approximately \$70,000. Gordon Robertson, as Chair, Ron Ekers, Tamara Davis and Paul Francis have been a very effective Working Group and I would like to express the appreciation and thanks of Council for their conscientious preparation of a Report following a poll of the community. A number of suggestions received strong support from the responders to the email questionnaire, but no proposal received unanimous endorsement. Most well-supported is the idea to establish an annual Postgraduate School of Astrophysics. Also popular were funding of students to international Symposia, particularly IAU meetings, and the provision of seed funds to stage Australian IAU Symposia. A proposal to promote science and astronomy in schools was made as a collective submission by the members of the Education & Public Outreach Committee of the ASA, although the aim of raising our international impact and assisting young astronomers is not directly addressed by this proposal. An important issue is whether to preserve the capital indefinitely or whether to exhaust the funds over some shorter time, such as 10 years, which would then provide a more substantial amount annually. The Council is now arranging for a more detailed proposal for a Postgraduate School to be drawn up, with attention to different possible models and how it would be administered.

3. **Astronomical Society of Australia Membership**

We have currently 414 members, which is a modest increase over the past year. This figure includes 100 students, and we particularly welcome all the new members to their first ASA Science Meeting. In a drive to have the distribution of Membership Grades reflect the expertise in the Society, the Council invited our experienced astronomers to apply for Fellowship status. I am pleased to congratulate and welcome 23 new Fellows, bringing to 76 the number of Fellows in the Society. I am also delighted to report that Dick Manchester has been elected as an Honorary Life Member in recognition of his hard work and significant contribution to the ASA over many years, particularly for his unstinting efforts for the successful IAU-General Assembly in Sydney.

There have also been sad losses to our membership since my last report and it is with great regret that I record the passing of Brian Robinson, Don Faulkner and John Dawe. All three made substantial and significant contributions to Australian Astronomy and all have been Members of the ASA Council, with Brian and Don both serving with distinction as President. We extend to their families our deepest sympathy.

4. PASA Progress and Impact Factor

It has been a very successful year for the PASA journal, with the Impact Factor rising again to a very creditable 1.158 for 2004, as measured by the JCR Journal Citation. This is a 10% increase over the previous year. This is the highest citation rating ever achieved by PASA and we acknowledge the stewardship of CSIRO Publishing. The publishing contracts are due for renewal at the end of 2005, and as ever, the ASA Council is considering how best to protect the interests of Australian astronomers, with a number of options available. We would like to congratulate and thank Louise Hartley for her achievements as Managing Editor and John Lattanzio for his effective leadership as the Chair of the PASA Editorial Advisory Committee.

5. Awards to Members

I would like to congratulate Bryan Gaensler and Brian Schmidt on the award of Federation Fellowships, bringing to 5 the number of astronomers who have been so honoured. ASA Councillor, David Blair was awarded the ANZAAS Medal earlier this year and Ron Ekers has recently been made a Fellow of the Royal Society. The Council would like to recognise these prestigious achievements and warmly congratulate the recipients.

6. Ellery Lectureship for 2005

It is my great pleasure to report that the 2005 Ellery Lectureship was awarded to Prof. John Davis, for his important contributions over many years to stellar interferometry. This is the ASA's most prestigious Prize, awarded every two years to a distinguished Australian Astronomer and John joins a select group of our most notable researchers. The title of John's keynote speech to the present Annual Science Meeting was "Forty Years of Progress in Long-baseline Optical Interferometry". The Ellery Lecture is named in memory of Robert Ellery, a distinguished Australian astronomer who was an influential Director of the Melbourne Observatory in the 19th Century, and is awarded every 2 years. You may recall that last year we also had an Ellery Lecturer, Prof. Don Melrose. This was in fact the 2003 award, held over because of the IAU in Sydney.

7. Harley Wood Lecture for 2005

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 Government Astronomer at the Sydney Observatory for more than 30 years. The focus of this award is to enhance the public appeal of astronomy and we aim to select exciting speakers who will carry on the legacy established by Harley Wood. The Harley Wood Lecturer for 2005 is Bryan Gaensler, who is at present a Denison Visiting Fellow at the University of Sydney. His lecture was given on Monday, July 4, entitled "The Brightest Explosion in History: Amazing Magnetars and the Giant Flare of 27th December".

8. Bok Prize 2005

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 Patrick Scott from ANU, for his thesis entitled "CO Spectral Line Formation in the Sun". Our thanks to John Storey for undertaking the difficult but rewarding task of assessing the six excellent reports submitted this year. The thesis from Alina Kiessling from LaTrobe University was given an Honourable Mention. It is encouraging that we have so many outstanding young astronomers starting their research careers.

9. Science Meets Parliament 2005

Science Meets Parliament was again held in Canberra, in March 2005. Scientists from a wide range of disciplines participated, which included comprehensive briefings before scheduled appointments with a number of Federal politicians. The interactions are potentially very valuable in raising the awareness of our elected representatives to issues concerning Science. There were at least 10 astronomers who attended and the ASA funded six participants, primarily young Postdoctoral Fellows. One of the most exciting events was again a Business Breakfast organised between the politicians and a selected number of young scientists. David Blair attended as the Representative of the ASA Council.

10. Australian e-Research

An initiative to develop strategies to enhance e-Research in Australia has been started. Geraint Lewis from the University of Sydney was chosen as the ASA Representative on the Reference Group, which is a large and diverse group of experts advisory to the Coordinating Committee, which is chaired by Mike Sargent. The inaugural Meeting was held in Sydney, last month.

11. Education and Public Outreach Committee (EPOC)

This Committee has been ably chaired for some time by Nick Lomb, Curator of the Sydney Observatory and continues to provide Factsheets through the Australian Astronomy web portal as an excellent resource for the wider community. For the past year the efforts of this Committee have been directed towards contributing to the preparation of the Decadal Plan Report. The Committee has been meeting this week and we commend their ongoing efforts.

12. ASA Websites

Members will have noted an update of the ASA web pages in recent months. The Society has also recently changed its website domain address to better reflect the ASA's ownership of the site. The new address of the ASA web pages, providing information specific to the Society, is:

<http://asa.astronomy.org.au>

This forms a neat pairing with the ASA's existing Australian Astronomy site, intended to provide information to the larger community, at

<http://www.astronomy.org.au>

The old ASA web page addresses re-direct automatically for now, but please update your browser bookmarks and published information.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Sarah Maddison in maintaining the Australian Astronomy site (hosted by CSIRO Publishing). Please pay particular attention to periodic requests to update material on this site. This web site is only useful to the public (and hence to us) if the information is kept up-to-date.

13. ASA Council for 2005-2006

Maria Cunningham, as our Treasurer, has implemented the significant changes to streamline the financial business of the ASA and to make future Annual Meetings simpler to organise (financially at least!) and we thank her enormously. I would also like to record my thanks to all members of Council, particularly Paul Cally and Dick Manchester, who retire this year, for their contribution and wisdom. Our two Secretaries, John O'Byrne and Marc Duldig, are to be especially thanked as they undertake cheerfully and efficiently the bulk of the day-to-day business of the ASA. I would also like to express appreciation to John Lattanzio for his excellent leadership of the Editorial Advisory Committee of PASA.

Following the procedures laid out in our Constitution, I am very pleased to announce that the new members of the ASA Council will be elected unopposed. My warm congratulations to Gary Da Costa who will be the new President, and to Brad Gibson who will be the new Vice-President. Thank you to both for their willingness to take on these roles. We will also welcome two new Members of Council, Rosemary Mardling and Geoff Bicknell, and congratulate them on their appointment. I would also like to thank Vicky Safouris for her contribution as our Student Representative. Our new Student Representative is Alina Kiessling from Swinburne and we welcome her. I have had a most interesting and rewarding time as President but it is time to give the stewardship into the very capable hands of Gary Da Costa.

May I remind you that the Council Members for the following 12 months will be:

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| Gary Da Costa | President |
| Brad Gibson | Vice President |
| Anne Green | Immediate Past President |
| John O'Byrne | Secretary |
| Marc Duldig | Secretary |
| Maria Cunningham | Treasurer |
| Geoff Bicknell | Councillor |
| David Blair | Councillor |
| Matthew Colless | Councillor |
| Michael Drinkwater | Councillor |
| Rosemary Mardling | Councillor |
| Alina Kiessling | Student Representative |
| John Lattanzio | Chair, Editorial Advisory Committee |
| Roy Allen | Donovan Trust and Macquarie Foundation Representative |

14. ASA ASM/AGM 2006

Following discussions at the recent Council Meeting we have a provisional suggestion that the Annual Science Meeting and Annual General Meeting of the ASA for 2006 will be hosted by the University of Tasmania, with Swinburne as a back-up. Thank you to these Institutions and we will confirm this decision shortly. Looking further ahead, there is a major General Relativity Conference in Sydney, July 2007, so it makes sense to schedule the Meeting that year in Sydney. We hope that AAO and ATNF may be our hosts at that time. Although it is still well in the future, sharing the job around the various institutions suggests that the 2008 ASM might be hosted by the University of Melbourne.

Finally, it remains for me to thank the LOC for their excellent organisation of this Meeting. In particular, Mike Wheatland (Chair), Rodrigo Gil-Merino, Daniel Mitchell and John O'Byrne have worked extremely hard, and I would also like to express appreciation to the IT experts helping to keep this tightly scheduled Meeting running well – Jess, Paul and Berian. I would like to thank the SOC for their advice and wisdom. We have still two days to run, but it has been a very large and successful Meeting so far and I expect the Conference Dinner and remaining talks to be equally enjoyable and interesting. The Council would also like to thank Katherine Newton-McGee and her Committee for organising a terrific Harley Wood Winter School at The Entrance.

Anne J. Green
July 5, 2005