



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE ACADEMY, 4 JULY 2006

#### 1. Highlights

This meeting represents the 40<sup>th</sup> AGM since the inception of the ASA in 1966 as the member organization for professional astronomers in Australia. The original founding members of the Society would be well satisfied as to how their baby is functioning at 40 years of age. The First President was, as is well known, Harley Wood, with Ben Gascoigne and Paul Wild as Vice-Presidents. Kevin Sheridan and Steve Smerd were the first secretaries and Bob Shobbrook was the first Treasurer. The Council meeting held last Sunday was also the 100<sup>th</sup> Council meeting. It is also worth noting that this meeting marks the commencement of Marc Duldig's 20<sup>th</sup> year as an ASA Secretary (with a 2 year gap in 1989-1990 when he was a Council member), while the other secretary John O'Byrne commences his 14<sup>th</sup> year in that role. The efficient functioning of the Society owes a great deal to the dedication of these two individuals. I note also that earlier this year John was awarded the Harry Messel medal by the University of Sydney Science Foundation for exceptional contributions to the School of Physics. This year also marks the 30<sup>th</sup> year of Roy Allen's direct association with the ASA Council.

#### *Decadal Plan for Astronomy 2006 – 2015*

As most people will be aware, the Decadal Plan for 2006-2015 was officially launched at the Academy of Science on 24 November 2005. This plan, which sets the scene for Australian Astronomy for the next decade, results from the efforts of a large number of people, who deserve our thanks for their contributions. The Decadal Plan is already playing an important role in shaping the input to the current NCRIS process, which has the potential to bring up to \$50M into Australian Astronomy over the next five years.

#### *Draft NCRIS Astronomy Investment Plan*

Brian Boyle, facilitator of the Astronomy component of the Federal Government's NCRIS process, will present the draft Astronomy Investment Plan at a lunchtime meeting on Wednesday July 5. The presentation will be followed by discussion. The Plan takes into account the input received on a variety of possible programs that might be included in the Plan obtained during an extensive set of visits by Brian to departments and institutions across the country.

#### *Increase in funding for ASA Student Travel Grants*

During the year Council raised the amount awarded for ASA Student travel grants from \$750 to \$1000. Under this program the ASA supported 14 graduate students this year, 4 of whom applied in the September round and 10 who applied in the March round. This level of support exceeded the nominal allocation for this program, but we will wait to see if this high level of interest is sustained before making a judgement about future allocation levels.

#### *ANITA becomes a Chapter of the ASA.*

At its February 2006 meeting the ASA council formally approved a resolution which saw ANITA (Australian National Institute of Theoretical Astrophysics) officially become a Chapter of the ASA. ANITA will not have ex-officio membership of the Council but ANITA representation will be taken into account when Council nominations are considered. Geoff Bicknell, John Lattanzio (PASA EAC Chair) and Rosemary Mardling are current ASA councillors who are also members of ANITA. The ASA President (or nominee) is, however, an ex-officio member of the ANITA Steering Committee. All members of ANITA are now required to be members of the ASA and, in return, the ASA will make an annual grant (initially set at \$1000) to ANITA to cover its operational costs.

It is likely that the Education and Outreach Committee (EPOC) will be given the same status, but the possibility remains under discussion.

#### *Revitalization of the Charlene Heisler Prize*

Many members will recall Dr. Charlene Heisler as an active member of our community who was only 38 when she died in 1999. At that time a number of her colleagues decided to perpetuate her memory through the formation of the Charlene Heisler prize. Over the past few years the Prize was aimed principally at involving school students in Astronomy. However, despite the dedicated work of a number of individuals, in this form

the prize has not been very successful. The ASA Council has debated this issue at length and after consulting with many of those involved in the original concept of the prize, has decided to change the format. The ASA has the Bok Prize for the best undergraduate report or essay, usually an Honours thesis and the Ellery Lectureship to recognise distinguished contributions to astronomy. However, there is no prize for a distinguished PhD thesis similar to, for example, the Trumpler Award of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Consequently, from this year onwards, the Charlene Heisler Prize will be awarded annually to the author of the most outstanding PhD thesis in Astronomy, or a closely related field, accepted by an Australian university during the previous calendar year. Nominations for the 2006 Prize are now open, full details will be available on the ASA web site shortly.

*Use of ASA Science Meeting Account and EFT Terminal for non-ASA Meetings or Workshops*

The ASA operates separate permanent bank accounts for its Annual Scientific Meeting and the Harley Wood Winter School. These accounts are linked to the ASA EFT terminal. These accounts relieve ASM and HWWS organisers of the burden of setting up accounts and EFT facilities. The Council has now decided that it will offer this facility to other groups in the Australian Astronomy community for their own meetings. There are a number of conditions for use of these accounts by meeting organisers, with the major one being that the ASA will not incur any costs by the use of the accounts and EFT facility by the meeting organisers. Full details are available from the ASA Secretaries. In this context it is also worth noting that at the most recent meeting Council reaffirmed an earlier policy decision that ASA does not offer financial support to scientific meetings other than in exceptional circumstances such as the IAU General Assembly held in Sydney.

*Archive of announcements via the ASA exploder*

An archive of announcements sent out to members via the ASA e-mail exploder is now kept on the ASA Website.

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

As members may be aware, when the accounts for the XXVth IAU General Assembly in Sydney were finalized, a surplus of approximately \$67,000 was returned to the ASA. A Working Group was established to consult with community and to advise Council on possible uses of these funds. The Working Group's top ranking proposal was to use the funds to conduct a graduate school for teaching postgraduate students a broad range of astrophysics, particularly theoretical astrophysics, that they may otherwise not receive during their studies. The Council has now charged a committee, to be chaired by Council member Rosemary Mardling, and which will contain members of ANITA and of the original Working Group, to provide it with a fully costed detailed proposal for operating such a graduate school by the next Council meeting in November. The committee has also been asked to comment on the relationship to, and potential effect on, the ASA's Harley Wood Winter School.

**3. Astronomical Society of Australia Membership**

The Society currently has 423 members with an additional 20 approved at the Council meeting. This represents a 7% increase from last year. There are 77 active and retired Fellows of the Society and 106 student members with an additional 18 approved at the Council meeting. Female members make up 23% of the total membership and 44% of the student membership. On behalf of the Council I would like to extend a warm welcome to the new members.

I should also take this opportunity to thank the Corporate Members of the ASA, the Anglo-Australian Observatory, the Australia Telescope National Facility, the Australian Antarctic Division, the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics of the ANU, the Swinburne Centre for Astrophysics and Supercomputing and the University of Sydney's Science Foundation for Physics. The contributions of these Corporate Members are used each year to help fund the Harley Wood Winter School.

**4. PASA Progress and Impact Factor**

The contract for publishing PASA has been renewed with CSIRO Publishing for a further two years until the end of 2007. It is particularly pleasing to report that the impact factor for PASA continues to show impressive gains: the 2005 figure from ISI Journal Citation Reports being 1.735, compared to 1.158 for 2004 (for comparison PASP is 3.350 and PASJ is 2.376). Once again this is the highest impact factor yet achieved by PASA and it shows the results that accrue from publishing high quality papers in the Society's journal. Special thanks are due to retiring PASA Managing Editor Louise Hartley for her achievements in raising the profile of the journal and, more recently, in organising the survey of members attitudes to and use of PASA. Nevertheless the future of PASA remains a subject for discussion. In particular, plans for potential new international journal incorporating a number of Asian journals don't appear to be likely to progress in the near future given that China and India have declined to be involved. A session on the future of PASA was held just prior to the AGM. Thanks are also due to John Lattanzio for his continuing effective leadership as the Chair of the PASA Editorial Advisory Committee, whose members are: Warrick Couch, David Coward, Lawrence Cram, Mike Dopita, Bryan Gaensler, Lisa Kewley, Sarah Maddison, Quentin Parker and Lister Staveley-Smith.

## 5. Awards to Members

One of the most pleasant duties of this Report is to draw attention to significant awards made to ASA members. This year I note that *Bryan Gaensler*, who is about to join University of Sydney as Federation Fellow, was awarded 2006 American Astronomical Society Newton Lacy Pierce Prize for his work on the interactions between neutron stars and their surroundings. Similarly, *Lisa Kewley*, currently a Hubble Fellow at Institute for astronomy in Hawaii, was awarded the 2006 American Astronomical Society Annie Jump Cannon award for her work on theoretical modelling and analysis of galaxy spectra. Very recently it was announced that *Brian Schmidt* from RSAA, ANU, was a co-winner (with Adam Reiss and Saul Perlmutter) of the 2006 Shaw Prize in Astronomy for his work on the accelerating expansion of the Universe. Also worthy of note is the award of a Member of the Order of Australia to *Phillip (Pip) Hamilton*, currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at Deakin University, for service to tertiary education, to research in the fields of radioastronomy and astronomy, to a range of scientific organizations and to the community. Pip served on the ASA Council 1982-84 and played a significant role in the development of the radio astronomy program at the University of Tasmania. Also worthy of mention is the award of the 2006 Grote Reber Medal to the developer of the Molonglo radio telescope, Emeritus Professor *Bernard Mills* of the University of Sydney. Finally, ANTF Director *Brian Boyle* has been elected a member of the Australian Academy of Science. The Council would like to recognise all these prestigious achievements and warmly congratulate the recipients.

## 6. Harley Wood Lecture for 2006

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 the aim is to select exciting speakers who will carry on the legacy established by Harley Wood. The Harley Wood Lecturer for 2006 is Prof. Mike Dopita whose is a Federation Fellow in the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Australian National University. His lecture was given on Monday, July 3 at the Visions Theatre of the National Museum of Australia. The title was “Star Formation Through Cosmic Time” and approximately 80 people attended.

## 7. Bok Prize 2006

The Bok Prize is awarded annually for excellence in an undergraduate student report or essay. It is customarily awarded to the best Honours Thesis, as judged by the ASA. This year the Prize is awarded to Brent Miszalski from Macquarie University, for his thesis entitled “Multi-Object Spectroscopy Field Configuration by Simulated Annealing”. Selecting the winner from among the excellent reports submitted this year was a difficult and challenging task, and we are grateful to the two assessors who took valuable time away from their work to carry out that task. As in previous years, the standard of the theses submitted for this prize is remarkably high with entries coming from a broad cross-section of institutions.

## 8. Berenice Page Medal

The Berenice Page Medal is awarded by the Society every two years and recognises excellence in original work in amateur astronomy. ASA Secretary Marc Duldig presented the 2006 award to Tom Richards of Eltham, Vic, at the conference dinner of the National Convention of Australian Amateur Astronomers held in Frankston, Vic, over Easter 2006. Tom received the award for his broad ranging CCD photometry of minor planets, variable stars and exoplanet searches.

## 9. Science Meets Parliament 2006

Science Meets Parliament was again held in Canberra, on 28 Feb and 1 March, 2006. This year the format changed with each participating society asked to nominate two representatives to meet with parliamentarians. The ASA's nominees were Andrew Hopkins from the University of Sydney and Brian Schmidt from the ANU. The meetings were quite productive with Andrew discussing a variety of topics with Pat Farmer (parliamentary secretary for education) and Brian visiting his local member, Special Minister of State, Gary Nairn. The interactions are potentially very valuable in raising the awareness of our elected representatives to issues concerning Science.

## 10. Education and Public Outreach Committee (EPOC)

This Committee continues to be ably chaired by Nick Lomb, Curator of the Sydney Observatory. It provides Factsheets, through the Australian Astronomy web portal, as an excellent resource for the wider community. An Education session is scheduled for the morning of Wednesday July 5 and there will be an informal meeting of EPOC at afternoon tea that same day. The next formal meeting of EPOC is scheduled for later in the year. Several members of EPOC will be attending the Education session at the upcoming IAU General Assembly.

## 11. ASA Council for 2006-2007

Maria Cunningham, who has been ASA Treasurer since 2004, has unfortunately found herself unable to continue in the position and has resigned. We thank her for the significant work she has done the past two

years, particularly in streamlining the financial business of the ASA. Council has recognised that the role of ASA Treasurer is potentially a particularly onerous one and, with Maria's assistance, is investigating the possibility of contracting with a financial services company to provide book-keeping and associated services for the Society. Once in place these arrangements should lessen the burden on the Treasurer. I would also like to record my thanks to all members of Council for their efforts and involvement in the past year, particularly Matthew Colless and Michael Drinkwater, who retire this year, and Immediate Past-President Anne Green who filled in for me on a number of occasions while I was away during the latter half of 2005. I would also like to place on record my thanks for the contributions of Brad Gibson, who served as Vice-President from this time last year until he resigned early this year on taking up a post in the UK. The two Secretaries, John O'Byrne and Marc Duldig, are to be especially thanked for their efforts in cheerfully and efficiently undertaking the bulk of the day-to-day business of the Society. I would also like to express appreciation to John Lattanzio for his continued excellent leadership of the Editorial Advisory Committee of PASA, and to out-going PASA Editor Louise Hartley for her outstanding efforts in raising the profile of PASA.

Following the procedures laid out in our Constitution, the current Council nominated new members for the incoming Council and the asked the membership for further nominations. No additional nominations were received and so the new members of the ASA Council will be elected unopposed. Congratulations to Warrick Couch, who will be the new Vice-President, to Diana Londish who will be the new Treasurer, and to Simon Ellingsen and Stuart Ryder who commence as Council members. Thank you for your willingness to take on these roles.

The Council Members for the following 12 months will be:

Gary Da Costa	President
Warrick Couch	Vice President
Anne Green	Immediate Past President
John O'Byrne	Secretary
Marc Duldig	Secretary
Diana Londish	Treasurer
Geoff Bicknell	Councillor
David Blair	Councillor
Simon Ellingsen	Councillor
Rosemary Mardling	Councillor
Stuart Ryder	Councillor
Alina Kiessling	Student Representative
John Lattanzio	Chair, Editorial Advisory Committee
Roy Allen	Donovan Trust and Macquarie Foundation Representative

## 12. ASA ASM/AGM 2007

Following discussions at the recent Council Meeting, the Annual Science Meeting and Annual General Meeting of the ASA for 2007 will be held in Sydney, once again in the first week of July, with the hosts being Macquarie University, the AAO and ATNF.

Although it is well into the future, sharing the job around the various institutions suggests that the 2008 ASM might be hosted by the University of Melbourne, or the University of Tasmania, or the University of WA.

Finally, it remains for me to thank the LOC and the SOC for their excellent organisation of this Meeting. In particular, LOC members Rob Smith (Chair), Annabelle Boag, Sean Farrell, Dianne Ferguson, Steve James, Warrick Lawson, Garry Robinson, Ravi Sood, Chris Wright, Mariah Beckett and Jill Gordon have all made substantial contributions to ensure everything has run smoothly. Similarly, the SOC, Warrick Lawson (Chair), Chris Wright, Kate Brooks, Brad Carter, Melanie Johnston-Hollit, John Lattanzio, Nick Lomb, Sarah Madison, Stuart Ryder and Tony Wong have put together an exciting scientific program that illustrates the diversity of astronomical research carried out by our community. We have still a day and a half to run, but it has been a particularly 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 Sean Farrell (LOC Chair) and Philip Lah (SOC Chair) and their committees for organising a very successful Harley Wood Winter School at Batemans Bay.

Gary S. Da Costa  
July 4, 2006