



President's Report for 2018/2019

University of Queensland, Wednesday 10th July 2019

1. Council 2018-2019

Stuart Wyithe	President
Cathryn Trott	Vice President
Virginia Kilborn	Immediate Past President
John O'Byrne	Secretary
Marc Duldig	Secretary
Yeshe Fenne	Treasurer
Elisabete da Cunha	Councillor
Krzysztof Bolejko	Councillor
Lisa Harvey-Smith	Councillor
John Lattanzio	Councillor
Daniel Zucker	Councillor
Debatri Chattopadhyay	Student Representative
Melanie Johnston-Hollitt	Chair, PASA Editorial Board
Tanya Hill (Co-opted)	Prizes and Awards co-ordinator
Michael Brown (Co-opted)	Media and Outreach co-ordinator

I would like to thank all council members for their contributions in the past year. Particular thanks go to council members holding ongoing roles in the society (John O'Byrne, Marc Duldig, Tanya Hill, and Michael Brown). Tanya Hill has taken sick leave in 2019 and Council thanks Krzysztof Bolejko for acting in the role of Prizes and Awards co-ordinator. Thanks go also to Gary da Costa for continuing in his role as our "Public Officer", and to Chapter Chairs Daniel Price, Mike Fitzgerald, Manodeep Sinha and Dan Zucker.

2. Highlights

Strategic Plan: During 2018 the ASA Council undertook a strategic planning exercise to understand the longer term goals of the Society, and to allow short term priorities to be placed in a broader strategic context. Following input from ASA Chapters through their steering committees as well as incorporation of feedback received from members. The Strategic Plan is based around the following 5 goals

Goal 1) Enhance the ASA's role as the pre-eminent body representing Australian astronomers

Goal 2) Expand the scope of the reach and impact of ASA activities, and build on the ASA's role as a facilitator of Australian professional astronomy conversation and networking

Goal 3) Maintain the ASA's role as a leader in the promotion of diversity in science and in Australian astronomy in particular

Goal 4) Harness the positive impact of Australian astronomy through maximising the effectiveness of educational and outreach activities undertaken by members

Goal 5) Broaden the ASA's support for student training, with focus on equity of access to activities and opportunity for all Australian astronomy students

The ASA Strategic Plan and accompanying Statement of Activities and Priorities may be viewed at the ASA website.

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

The Strategic Plan aims to articulate the priorities of the ASA, and seeks to identify opportunities with the goal of maximising the effectiveness of the ASA in achieving these priorities.

Code of Conduct and Equity and Conduct Committee: It is the policy of the Astronomical Society of Australia (ASA) that all participants in its activities are able to enjoy an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment, and that its members conduct themselves appropriately during all professional activities. As part of our ongoing commitment to this policy, during 2018/2019 the ASA Council revised the [ASA Code of Conduct](#) and [Statement of Ethics](#) documents. In particular, the revised Code of Conduct and Statement of Ethics makes it clear that ASA guidelines apply to all participants at ASA endorsed meetings or activities, and to ASA members at all astronomical meetings or activities.

During 2018/2019 the ASA Council also instituted a new process by which potential breaches of the Code of Conduct or Statement of Ethics can be reported. This process is outlined in the new document [Handling of Potential Breaches of the ASA Statement of Ethics and Code of Conduct](#). Council has also convened a new [Ethics and Conduct Committee \(ECC\)](#). The ECC is charged with oversight of the ASA Code of Conduct and Statement of Ethics as well as handling of potential breaches.

ASA members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the new documents, which may be found on the ASA web pages at http://asa.astronomy.org.au/ethics_and_conduct.php.

Awards: Members of the ASA were recognized in several awards over the past 12 months:

David McClelland was elected to the Australian Academy of Science for roles in designing, installing and commissioning Advanced LIGO's acquisition system and pioneering quantum science experiments

The following members were recipients in the Australia Day 2019 honours list.

Ron Ekers AO: "For distinguished service to science as a radio astronomer, to scientific education, and to astronomical and international organisations."

Elaine Sadler AO: "For distinguished service to science as an astrophysicist, in the field of galaxy evolution, and to gender equality"

David Malin AM: "For significant service to science as an astronomer and astrophotographer."

Meetings: The 2018 ASA Annual Scientific Meeting was held from the 25th to the 29th of June at Swinburne University. This was the 55nd Scientific Meeting of the Astronomical Society of Australia.

304 people registered to attend the ASA Meeting at which there were 28 science sessions including 16 special sessions, 6 public meetings and the Harley Wood public lecture.

The AIP congress was held in Perth from 9-13 December 2018 and had an astronomy focussed session with a focus on new Australian large facilities. ASA member Lister Staveley-Smith was on the program committee.

APRIM 2020: As previously announced Australia won the bid to host the Asia-Pacific IAU Meeting (APRIM) in Perth in 2020. The bid was co-led by ICRAR and CASS, and was supported by the ASA, amongst other Australian institutes.

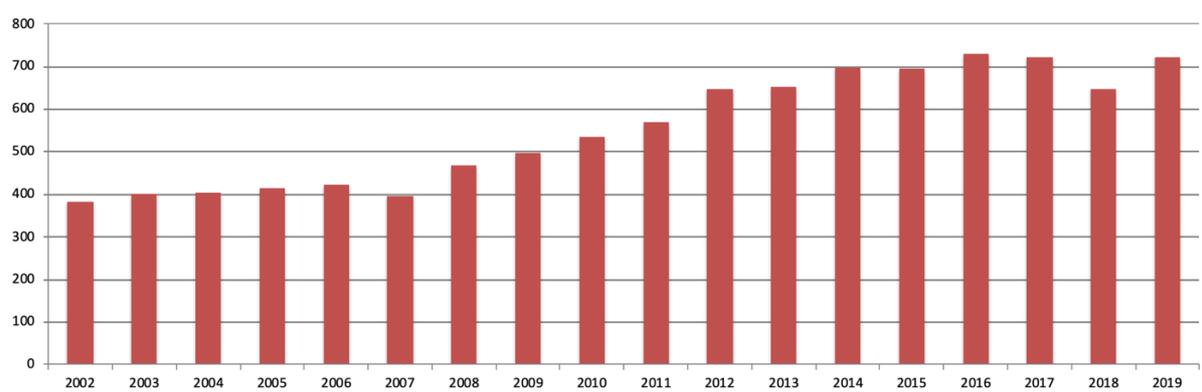
3. ASA events in 2018/2019

The 13th annual Australian National Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics science workshop was held on 7th-8th February 2019 at Swinburne University.

The Astroinformatics school - "Rise of the machines" was held on 4th-6th February 2019 at Swinburne University.

4. ASA membership

The ASA membership has increased since 2018, with 722 members now classified as ‘Active’ or ‘Pending Renewal’ - the latter group still owing fees for 2018 and/or 2019. Note that the dip in numbers in 2018 reflects the earlier inclusion of long term unfinancial members around the time the Wild Apricot membership system was introduced.



The second graph illustrates the gender breakdown of the society.



Note that two new categories of membership have been created:

- International - for members living and working overseas to retain the privileges of their substantive membership grade but at reduced cost.
- Alumni - for members who resign their membership and do not receive regular benefits of ASA membership, but may wish to share the story of their career path outside of astronomy with our [ECR members](#).

Deaths: 2018/2019 saw the passing of Michael Dopita. Mike was a long-term fellow of the ASA and served on the ASA Council from 1993-95. Our community will remember his very significant contributions to the field, his broad knowledge across all aspects of astronomy, and his genuine interest in the research of those he met.

5. Honorary Fellow

The ASA Council elected Michelle Storey PSM for Honorary Fellowship of the Society. Michelle is elected in recognition of her contributions to Astronomy in Australia including service to PASA, work enabling the hosting of the SKA, and promotion of astronomy research.

6. Financial

The ASA's finances are in a very healthy position. At the time of writing (July 2019) the Foundation for Astronomy holds sufficient funds to cover ASA prizes for the next 15 years. In addition, the overall ASA expenditure is significantly below income, leaving a typical free cash flow of around \$35,000 p.a. Our current membership is at 722 members with 620 financial (86%) (compared with 648 members of whom 602 were financial last year). This is a result of many people renewing after automatic system reminders and a number of new members.

In view of the healthy financial state of the Society, the ASA Council is investigating ways to more effectively forward Society initiatives, guided by recommendations of the Strategic Plan. One identified priority in the Strategic Plan is the retaining of paid services to progress ASA initiatives. Council agreed to funding of a position 0.2 FTE position up to \$20,000 pa for a one year trial. This level was set through analysis of Council member workloads and tasks. This role is currently filled by Deb Gooley.

Details on the Society's finances and audited accounts are available in the Treasurer's report.

7. Publications of the ASA (PASA)

The Chair of the Editorial Board, Melanie Johnston-Hollitt, reports that PASA is doing well, with submissions having increased and the impact factor being on an increasing trajectory. Consequently, the threshold for getting into PASA is higher and the quality of the papers being published is on par with other major journals. PASA expanded publication to ~1140 pages per annum.

PASA's previous ISI two-year impact factor (reflecting citations in 2018 to papers published in 2016 and 2017) was released in June 2018. It rose to 4.63 putting PASA in the top quartile of astronomical journals for the first time. PASA's 2018 impact factor has recently been released and is slightly increased to 4.878. For reference, ApJ is at 5.580 (5.551), MNRAS is at 5.231 (5.194), A&A is at 6.209 (5.565), PASJ is at 2.750 (2.244), and PASP is at 3.470 (3.409). The 2017 values for these journals are in brackets. This is excellent news for PASA.

Other highlights of PASA will be listed in the separate PASA report.

8. ASA Prizes and awards

The following prizes have been or will be awarded during the 2019 Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM):

Bok Prize for outstanding research in astronomy by an Honours or eligible Masters student

Awarded to **Sam Cree** for his thesis “Can the fluctuations of the Quantum Vacuum Solve the Cosmological Constant Problem?”. Sam completed his honours research at the University of Queensland, supervised by Tamara Davis and Timothy Ralph.

Charlene Heisler Prize for the most outstanding PhD thesis in astronomy

Awarded to **Adam Thomas**: for his thesis “The ionising radiation and gas-phase metallicity in the narrow-line regions of Seyfert galaxies” completed at the Australian National University and supervised by Lisa Kewley.

Louise Webster Prize for outstanding research by a scientist early in their post-doctoral career

Awarded to **Shivani Bhandari** from Swinburne University for the paper “The Survey for Pulsars and Extragalactic Radio Bursts – II. New FRB discoveries and their follow-up” (2018, MNRAS, 475. 1427).

Anne Green Prize for a significant advance or accomplishment by a mid-career scientist

Awarded to **Mark Krumholz** from the ANU for contributions to our understanding of the origin of turbulence in the interstellar medium of galaxies, and its relationship to star formation and mass transport.

Ellery Lectureship recognising outstanding contributions in astronomy or a related field Awarded to **Matthew Bailes** from Swinburne University.

Peter McGregor Prize in recognition of exceptional achievement or innovation in astronomical instrumentation will be announced during the upcoming ASA conference dinner.

Encouraging gender diversity: The ASA is strongly committed to improving the representation and status of women in astronomy. The Society expects that female candidates should comprise at least 30% (increased from previous expectations of 20%) of the nominations for each prize and encourages institutions to help achieve this goal. The percentage of female nominations are variable because of the relatively small total number of applicants, but the statistics over recent years are as follows:

Prize	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Bok	61%	0%	29%	50%	83%	50%	0%	17%
Heisler	38%	44%	43%	25%	40%	33%	25%	20%
Webster	50%	100%	0%	0%	100%	33%	0%	0%
Green	40%	50%						

Many thanks to Tanya Hill and Krzysztof Bolejko for overseeing the awards, and to the judges of the awards.

9. Inclusion, Diversity and Equity in Astronomy (IDEA) Chapter

Dan Zucker is Chair of the ASA’s IDEA Chapter. The IDEA steering committee seeks to foster best practice in institutions with respect to a broader vision of diversity and inclusion than had previously been considered. The steering committee finalised and distributed updated selection criteria for the

Pleiades Awards following the 2018 ASA, with submissions received from institutions in November 2018. Awards will be presented at the IDEA Chapter Town Hall meeting.

10. Education and Public Outreach Chapter (EPOC)

Michael Fitzgerald is Chair of the ASA's EPOC Chapter. The Chapter has undertaken a number of activities over the previous year. These include:

- The second biennial workshop was held at ICRAR in Perth, Western Australia in December 2018. It was well attended (40 attendees) and held a variety of talks, panels, discussion sessions and workshops from ASA members as well as the broader astronomical EPO community.
- ASA EPOC was a financial supporter of Macquarie University's successful bid to hold the 2020 Communicating Astronomy with the Public conference in September in Sydney.

11. Australian National Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics (ANITA)

ANITA has undertaken a number of activities of the over the previous year. These include:

- The [13th annual Australian National Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics science workshop](#) which was held on 7th-8th February 2019 at Swinburne University. The workshop provided a review of theoretical astrophysics in Australia, and facilitated collaboration to help build the community of theoretical astrophysicists.
- The [Astroinformatics school - "Rise of the machines"](#) was held on 4th-6th February 2019 at Swinburne University. The School provided an interactive introduction to machine learning.

12. Early Career Research Chapter (ECR)

Manodeep Sinha is chair of the ECR chapter from 2017-2019. The Chapter has undertaken a number of activities of the over the previous year. These include:

- Townhall meeting at ASA ASM 2018
- Speed-Meet-a-Mentor at the ASA ASM 2018
- Continuation of the mentoring program
- The series of [SciCoder](#) workshops enabled by [ASTRO 3D](#) and [ADACS](#).

13. Designated Observatories

The ASA has been requested by Standards Australia to compile a list of *designated* optical observatories that are judged to be valuable resources for (i) research, (ii) education and (iii) community use. Acceptance as a designated observatory does not imply any form of legal status, but it should enhance a case for protection against obtrusive lighting. New designated observatories approved in 2018-2019 have been:

- Mapleton Observatory - Adrian and Lainie Adams (Mapleton QLD)
- Wiruna - Astronomical Society of NSW

The Standard AS4282 on The Control of the Obtrusive Effects of Outdoor Lighting was issued in October 1997 by Standards Australia and has recently been reviewed and updated. Fred Watson was the principle ASA representative involved in this review.

14. Communications

The ASA email mailing list remains the primary communication avenue for ASA news. Members can post directly to the list asa@mailman.sydney.edu.au. Note that this is a new form of the address, although the older form still works for now. This list is also used for Communications from the ASA Council to members regarding items of broad interest.

Michael Brown is the ASA's media and outreach coordinator and oversees the ASA facebook and twitter accounts and provides general media advice to the society. The ASA (internal) Facebook page continues to be a valuable avenue for quickly highlighting recent articles, awards and upcoming events. A new outward facing Facebook page has also been created and aims to provide information to a wider audience. The ASA twitter account (@AstroSocAus) has 1137 followers and regularly tweets ASA and general astronomy news.

The ASA Events Calendar lists all ASA sponsored events as well as conferences, workshops and meetings that are open to broad Australian and international participation (see <http://asa.astronomy.org.au/calendar.html>).

15. Science & Technology Australia

The ASA is a member of Science & Technology Australia (STA), which is Australia's peak body across science and technology. ASA members attended major STA events in the past year, including Science Meets Business and the STA Presidents' and CoE Forum (Cath Trott). Science Meets Parliament has been delayed until November 2019 owing to the Federal election. Science Meets Business was held in Brisbane in October 2018. Moving forward, Science Meets Business will be re-formed to ensure its continued relevance for members. Cath Trott was elected as the Physical Science Cluster Representative on the STA Board. Alan Duffy was the Early Career Representative until his term ended late in 2018.

17. Progress against 2016/2017 priorities

- 1) Complete Strategic Plan
 - The strategic plan was completed
- 2) Following the publication of the PASA history, decide on next direction for the ASA history project
 - This item is ongoing
- 3) Web upgrade
 - The upgrade is ongoing

A number of priorities from the Strategic Plan have already been implemented. These include:

- 1) Refreshing of the ASA Code of Conduct and development of mechanisms for investigating and responding to breaches of the Code
- 2) Introduced paid executive support for the ASA Council to progress initiatives

16. New Priorities for 2018/2019

The ASA Council has identified the following Council priorities to concentrate on for the next 12 months from within the Strategic Plan (for discussion):

- 1) Encourage increased diversity among ASA prize recipients, considering processes for both soliciting nominations and decisions.
- 2) Expand the size, allocation and number of student travel scholarships, including determination of the priorities for student travel funding, and consideration of whether student funding should be needs based as well as how this would be best achieved
- 3) Update or reaffirm the statement of purpose, focus and timing for the ASA ASM, and the Harley Wood School of Astronomy, including identifying key gaps in student training and experience
- 4) Following the publication of the PASA history, continue with the next phase of the ASA history project
- 5) Complete the Web upgrade, with assistance from the new ASA executive support.

18. Harley Wood School of Astronomy and ASM/AGM 2019

The 2020 HWSA and ASM/AGM will be hosted by ICRAR. The ASA will be incorporated within the 2020 APRIM meeting in Perth.

17. ASA Council for 2019/2020

Cathryn Trott	President
John Lattanzio	Vice President
Stuart Wytthe	Immediate Past President
Yeshe Fenner	Treasurer
John O'Byrne	Secretary
Marc Duldig	Secretary
Michael Brown	Media and Outreach
Melanie Johnston-Hollitt	PASA editorial Board Chair
Tanya Hill	Prizes and awards co-ordinator
For election	Student Representative
Elisabete da Cunha	Councillor
Krzysztof Bolejko	Councillor, Prizes and awards co-ordinator for 2019
Barbara Catinella	Councillor
Ilya Mandel	Councillor
Daniel Zucker	Councillor

19. Closing Remarks

The ASA remains committed to serving and supporting the community, and bringing Australian Astronomers together to collaborate and enhance research outcomes for Australia. The ASA has taken lead roles in issues of encouraging diversity and equity in Australian science and in encouraging development of researcher's careers within and beyond astronomy.

Over recent years the ASA has seen significant growth, built on the growth and success of Australian astronomy as a whole, and the Society is now in a position to expand and enhance its successful activities. Some ideas for this are outlined in the Strategic Plan. Council looks forward to using this plan as a blueprint for how the ASA can continue to add value to the Australian astronomy community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stuart Wyithe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Professor Stuart Wyithe
President