



## AAO ADVISORY COMMITTEE PUBLIC UPDATE

The AAOAC held its 6th meeting on 20 September 2013 at its North Ryde facility. A summary of the key recommendations and outcomes of this meeting are as follows:

### Observatory Planning and Development

- AAO Forward Look: The AAOAC notes the progress on actions arising from the AAO Forward Look and the high priority being assigned to these activities by the Director. The AAOAC advises the Director to reassess the 28 action areas in the light of developments in the past two years. In particular, the AAOAC advises the Director to undertake a review of overall AAO planning in preparation for the Australian Astronomy Decadal planning process and in the light of evolving issues surrounding near-term 8m access and possible future ESO membership.
- International Telescope Support Office: The AAOAC notes and supports the Director's intention to combine support for external facilities (e.g. Gemini, Magellan) into a new international telescope support office. This office could form a component of the interaction between Australia and ESO in the future.
- ESO and the future of 8m access: The AAOAC is very aware of the crisis confronting Australian optical astronomy with respect to long term access to competitive large-scale optical telescopes (in the 8m class and above). Like the Australian astronomical community, the AAOAC is fully supportive of Australian membership in ESO as the best long-term solution. The AAOAC recognizes that the scale of the funding necessary for ESO membership will require a holistic approach and planning process across all of Australia's astronomical assets and investments including those of the AAO. The AAOAC is willing to provide advice in this area along with that of AAL and the broader community through the decadal planning process.
- Siding Spring Observatory: The AAOAC was advised that although much and highly commendable progress has been made by the ANU in restoring services to Siding Spring after the bushfires, more progress is needed in establishing Emergency Control Organisation arrangements which include revised SSO evacuation procedures and training for staff and residents at SSO. AAO management will continue to work with the ANU to expedite this.
- Remote Observing: The AAOAC was impressed with the rapid implementation of remote observing capabilities at the AAO and the extent of community uptake of this capability. The Director and staff are to be commended on this important development and the AAOAC advised the Director to assess the possibility of expanding the capability to sites other than AAO HQ in Sydney. The AAOAC endorses the Director's plans to put in place measures to ensure that the increased use of remote observing does not lead to staff at Siding Spring becoming isolated from the primary scientific mission of the Observatory.

## **AAO Instrumentation Program**

- New instruments: The AAOAC noted the results of the community workshop that identified concepts for HECTOR and VELOCE. The AAOAC advised the Director that these instruments should be seen in the context of being possibly the last major instruments developed specifically for the AAT. Hence the instrument concepts should be developed with the requirement of long-term science missions on the AAT in an era of 8m+ access.
- Instrumentation Project Management: The AAOAC was fully supportive of the Director's initiative to review the project management processes within the AAO instrument development team, drawing on the lessons learnt from the completion of the HERMES project.
- HERMES: The AAOAC noted and applauded the level of effort expended to disassemble, transport, assemble and commission HERMES at the AAO. This is an essential instrument for the AAO's future and the AAOAC looks forward to excellent scientific outcomes.
- 4MOST: The AAOAC recognizes that 4MOST is an important opportunity for AAO to form strong collaborative bonds with ESO that may well be central to agreements around Australia's future membership. The AAOAC advises the Director to give this activity high priority and to seek additional community engagement where possible.
- TAIPAN: The AAOAC advised the Director to ensure that strong project management was in place for the design, construction, integration, commissioning and delivery of TAIPAN given the distributed nature of its planning and construction.

## **Departmental support**

- NCRIS Funds: The AAOAC notes that the NCRIS program is being reviewed by the Department with the possibility of developing a future program. The AAOAC is willing to make input to that development. The AAOAC recognizes the importance of the NCRIS2 funds identified for the purchase of 8m access for the Australian community beyond 2015 and hopes that these funds can be confirmed as soon as possible.
- DTCA issues: There are a number of opportunities for the AAO engagement in instrumentation projects with countries including China (e.g. KDUST) that may raise issues under the Defence Trade Controls Act and related legislation. The AAOAC believes that the AAO and possibly other Divisions within the Department will be in need of Departmental support and advice in this matter.

## **Other matters**

- New Member: The AAOAC noted the arrival of Prof. Anne Green and welcomes her as a new member of the AAOAC, and also welcomed Ms Ditta Zizi as the Departmental observer.
- Retiring Member: The AAOAC notes that Prof. Brian Schmidt is retiring from the AAOAC having been a member since the AAOAC inception, and prior to that having served as an Anglo-Australian Telescope Board member, and thanks him for his invaluable contributions.