

ATUC Report to the Director, June 2006

This meeting of the AT Users Committee was held at ATNF headquarters, Marsfield on 7 June 2006. The meeting began at 9.00 am and finished at 3.15 pm. During this meeting ATUC members also visited the AT receiver lab, where a tour of the new 7mm receiver system was given by Graham Moorey.

Attendance: Elaine Sadler (Chair), Jim Lovell (Secretary), Kate Brooks, Erwin de Blok (substitute for Helmut Jerjen), Ralf-Juergen Dettmar (overseas representative), Alyson Ford (student representative), Melanie Johnston-Hollitt, Katherine Newton-McGee (student representative), Juergen Ott, Stuart Ryder, Mark Wardle, Chris Wright

Apologies: Joss Bland-Hawthorn, Helmut Jerjen, Rachel Webster

The Chair welcomed Stuart, Katherine and Alyson, who were attending their first meeting as ATUC members, as well as Ralf Dettmar (University of Bochum), who attended this meeting as an international member. ATUC also recorded its thanks to the outgoing Chair, Steven Tingay, who completed his term at the December 2005 meeting. ATUC thanks the former student members, Katherine Newton-McGee and Alyson Ford, for their contributions.

Commendations and successes:

- ATUC and the user community commend the ATNF on reinstating the Synthesis Imaging Workshops, which we see as an important part of student training.
- We congratulate Warwick Wilson and his team on the successful commissioning of three new instruments: the MOPS spectrometer and a new 12mm system at Mopra, and the 6GHz multibeam receiver at Parkes.
- ATUC members were impressed by the smooth transition to the new OPAL online proposal system which was used for the first time in the 2006APRS proposal round. We thank Jessica Chapman and Chris Owen for their efforts in getting this system up and running in such a user-friendly way.
- We commend ATNF for its education and outreach work with schools in remote areas of WA.
- We congratulate the NTD team on the achievement of first fringes with the NTD, which represents a significant milestone for the project.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chair thanked departing members (Joss Bland-Hawthorn, Helmut Jerjen, Mark Wardle and Chris Wright) for their contributions to ATUC. The Chair also expressed ATUC's warm thanks to the outgoing Secretary, Jim Lovell, whose term finished at this meeting, for his many contributions to the organization and smooth running of our meetings over the past three years.

Elaine Sadler (ATUC Chair)

ATUC Recommendations [ATNF response requested]

Matters arising from Director's Response to the December 2005 ATUC Report

1. We urge the ATNF to continue improving the reliability and documentation of the new ATCA observing system as a high priority. Several users have expressed concern at lost time due to the control computer Ellen crashing at the ATCA.

2. The need for ATNF to review and rationalise the existing ATCA 3mm documentation and reduction scripts remains urgent. Users identified a number of issues related to 3mm documentation and calibration which are impacting seriously on productivity of the ATCA. These include:
 - a. Dantpos files, which provide improved antenna positions, are not readily available and cannot be updated by a user without updating MIRIAD.
 - b. Regular monitoring of a set of 3mm flux calibrators is needed, and Director's time should be assigned to this if necessary.
 - c. Doppler tracking should be implemented automatically in CAOBS to take account of the motion of the Earth. This is critical at 3 and 12mm because of the smaller velocity bandwidth.

ATUC would be happy to provide more detail if necessary and have nominated Kate Brooks as contact person.

New recommendations:

3. ATUC commend the authors of the mm Astronomy White Paper and support its recommendations. In particular, we strongly support the ATNF's work to develop FPAs at high frequencies. In light of recent developments ATUC are happy to revisit the ATCA 115 GHz upgrade project and prioritise it together with other development projects.
4. ATUC recommend that an annual one-day ATNF Science Symposium be reinstated from 2007, in conjunction with the first ATUC meeting of each year. These symposia, at which users present science results from the national facility telescopes, were held regularly until 2004 (often as a joint symposium with the Anglo-Australian Observatory) and are seen as an extremely valuable showcase for ATNF science.
5. ATUC were enthusiastic about having a one-day LBA/e-VLBI 'New Capabilities' workshop in conjunction with our next (late 2006) meeting. This should concentrate on science opportunities, and be aimed at non-experts and possible new users. It would be excellent to have an invited speaker from Europe to present recent EVN results, and also to include an introduction to VLBI techniques. ATUC nominate Stuart Ryder to sit on the SOC to advise on the science program. An important goal would be to identify the likely number of new users. If there is a significant increase in LBA/VLBI usage, additional resources would obviously be needed to provide documentation and user support.
6. As part of the eVLBI initiative, we also suggest that the ATNF could provide two sets of demonstration data (one extragalactic/continuum, one Galactic/spectral-line) which would be taken at an early stage, calibrated, imaged and made publicly available. This would help users assess and appreciate the capabilities of the new system.
7. Although ATUC are happy with the current process of allocating Director's Time at Narrabri and Mopra, we would like to see an improvement in response times at Parkes, where several users report that recent requests for Director's Time have, on occasion, not been acknowledged.

Other Items [ATNF response optional]

A number of issues which were raised by individual users, or which arose in discussion during our meeting, are listed here for information. These have already been brought to the attention of the ATNF Assistant Director for Operations, Dave McConnell, and ATNF response is optional.

Items arising from Director's Response to the December 2005 ATUC Report

- Following on from Director's Response item 6e: Joint ATNF/University appointments.
 - This issue was to be raised at the recent ATSC meeting and possible models for CSIRO/University partnerships were to be discussed. ATUC would be interested to see a summary of these discussions.
 - ATUC are concerned that despite the good number of jointly supervised students and some joint ATNF/university appointments, the fraction of university PIs and first-author publications are still low. Several possible causes were suggested, including:
 - Difficulties in applying for time
 - Ease of data reduction
 - No synthesis workshop recently
 - ATUC have formed a sub-committee comprising Elaine Sadler, Melanie Johnston-Hollitt and Chris Wright to investigate the causes further and report back.
- Director's Response, item 17. ATNF made a commitment to update the positions database before the next proposal deadline. However at time of writing, this has not been done. Please could the database be updated as soon as possible?

New Items:

Computing

- ATUC request that the ATCA users' guides (including remote observing) be updated to reflect changes since the migration from VMS to Linux observing software.
- Users outside ATNF would like access to the at_meetings mailing list to continue. ATUC suggest that some sort of registration system be put in place to allow this.
- Vince McIntyre raised the issue that outside users with ATNF accounts can appear as CSIRO staff members when sending email and that this needs to be stopped without serious impact on users. ATUC suggest that most outside users do not need (or want) a CSIRO email account (as distinct from a user account). If removing access to email for outside user solves the problem, then ATUC do not see the need to make any additional changes.
- Regarding IM, PT/VC (Skype, google talk) access for visitors. These are important tools for users and ATUC would like to see them available on the pink cables. Visitors use a variety of software types and versions (and configurations) so access from personal laptops would be preferable.
- On which Narrabri computers is AIPS fully installed? ATUC would like to see this information documented.

Astrophysics

- A request was made for more information about the process for the establishment of jointly supervised PhD projects. In the past ATNF sent out a

list of potential projects and supervisors to heads of university departments. It seems that this no longer happens or if it does the coverage is not as wide and the projects are now listed on a website:

<http://www.atnf.csiro.au/education/graduate/research.html>. People did not know of the existence of this website so it needs to be better publicised. Will ATNF review the process of publicising jointly supervised PhD positions?

- The ATCA on-the-fly mapping project looks interesting. ATUC would like to see a more detailed proposal including required resources and a more detailed science case.

AT Time Assignment Committee

- ATUC received a number of comments regarding feedback from the TAC and although it seems the community are generally happy with the detailed feedback there are some issues about the pro-forma material. We will forward these comments to the TAC chair.

National Facility Support

- ATUC have received a number of comments and requests on the ATOA which we forward to ATNF for consideration:
 - "I'd like to suggest that we get the ATCA data into ATOA more quickly than currently. atoa.atnf.csiro.au states that only data up to Sep 21 2005 is available. Furthermore it isn't possible to select a year in the window "observation date" which is later than 2004."
 - "Will data be posted on ATOA immediately once the fast link is operational? I think this would be useful."
 - "Could it be made easier to access one's own data using ATOA during the proprietary period?"
 - "Can data from the calibrators project (C007) be made public immediately? Can other projects choose to do this voluntarily at the proposal stage, and have this propagate through the system?"
- An ATUC member noted that he was no longer receiving a paper copy of the ATNF Newsletter. How are ATNF Newsletter subscriptions organised? Is it possible to find out if you're on the mailing list? Does an email go out announcing the new edition and if so, who is it sent to?
- An overseas user requested that ATNF provide information on how to travel to the observatories from parts of the country other than Sydney. Directions from Melbourne were specifically requested.

Parkes

- A user requested that new bicycles be provided for users at Parkes, perhaps similar to those at Narrabri, and that the location of bicycle pumps be made obvious.

Narrabri

- A user made the following request, which several ATUC members supported: "It would be great to have an air conditioning system at the Narrabri lodge which allows temperature regulation for every room separately."

Next ATUC Meeting: To be arranged to coincide with eVLBI workshop.