

Optical/IR infrastructure priority setting process

The Town Hall community meeting agreed that the "base" component of Gemini (i.e. the current 6.19% + Aspen program) is the community's highest priority, and that it should be wholly funded under NCRIS (i.e. without the LIEF or university contributions of the present arrangement).

The other potential components of the NCRIS optical astronomy bid on which the community wished further information before making any decisions were: additional 8m access, AAO, PILOT, ELT and SSO.

Particular issues raised at the meeting included:

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| 8m: | How oversubscribed is Gemini at present and what increase in science is expected from having more time? |
| AAO | What is the new instrument and how important to the community? |
| PILOT | How realistic is the costing? what are the risk-mitigation strategies? |
| ELT | Is GMT the right ELT for Australia? what are the risk-mitigation strategies? |
| SSO | What are the options for future management of the site? |

The Town Hall meeting decided that the first step to addressing these questions and other issues is to provide concise summaries of the information and arguments relevant to deciding whether, and at what level, these components might be included in the NCRIS bid.

For each component a suitable proponent has been requested to prepare a 4 to 6 page document that provides the essential information on which the community can base its decision. The proponents are asked to consult with colleagues and relevant committees (e.g. AGSC, ELTWG etc.) in preparing their documents.

The proponents are:

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| - additional 8m access | Warrick Couch |
| - AAO | Matthew Colless |
| - PILOT | John Storey |
| - ELT | Charles Jenkins |
| - SSO | Penny Sackett |

Questions that each document should address are those likely to be raised during community discussions, and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ? describe the infrastructure that the facility would provide, and the timescale.
- ? describe how access to the infrastructure will be allocated (e.g. time assignment committees; what fraction will be available to what constituency, etc.).
- ? describe the likely outcomes, in terms of refereed papers, PhD completions and the like over the next 5 or 10 years.
- ? other notable outcomes, e.g. industrial partnerships, technology development, maintenance of engineering expertise.
- ? what evidence do is there of demand for the facility?
- ? identify the major risks for the proposal, a risk mitigation strategy, and any major milestones to be reached.
- ? what NCRIS funding is required and what is the basis for this estimate? How should this funding be phased over the 5 years 2007-2011?
- ? what other sources of funding can be anticipated to augment the NCRIS funds?

In order that these documents can be used as the basis of the actual NCRIS proposal, they should also show how the component is consistent with the Key Principles of the NCRIS Investment Framework, which are set out in the NCRIS Roadmap:

- ? Australia's investment in research infrastructure should be planned and developed with the aim of maximising the contributions of the research and development system to economic development and social wellbeing;
- ? Infrastructure resources should be focussed in areas where Australia is, or has the potential to be, world-class (in both discovery and application driven research) and provide international leadership;
- ? Major infrastructure should be developed on a collaborative, national, non-exclusive basis. Infrastructure funded through NCRIS should serve the research and innovation system broadly, not just the host/funded institutions. NCRIS funding should encourage collaboration and co-investment among universities, government, independent and private sector research organisations. It should not be the function of NCRIS to support institutional level (or small-scale collaborative) infrastructure;
- ? Access is a critical issue in the drive to optimise Australia's research infrastructure. In terms of NCRIS funding there should be as few barriers as possible to accessing major infrastructure for those undertaking meritorious research;
- ? Due regard should be given to the whole-of-life costs of major infrastructure, with funding available under NCRIS for operational costs where appropriate; and

? The Strategy should seek to enable the fuller participation of Australian researchers in the international research system.

Finally, the document should show how the component fits into the overall astronomy investment plan, the criteria for which have been given as:

Criterion 1: An investment plan must result in excellent research infrastructure that addresses the national requirements of the relevant capability area described in the NCRIS Roadmap.

Criterion 2: An investment plan must result in research infrastructure that is accessible by researchers on the basis of merit at reasonable prices, and that encourages collaboration in research.

Criterion 3: An investment plan must include a facility ownership and management structure that will result in the efficient and effective operation of the infrastructure.

Criterion 4: An investment plan must include an implementation strategy and business case that will result in the efficient implementation and effective ongoing financial management of the infrastructure.

These documents should be regarded as evolving towards the actual NCRIS proposal. The timescale for the production of these documents and the eventual proposal is necessarily short.

The proposed schedule is therefore as follows:

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| 15 May | first draft of component documents circulated to community (in time for the AAT new instrument meeting and ELT meeting on 17 and 18 May, and the NCRIS Facilitator's road-trip). |
| 16-31 May | Facilitator to visit institutions and collate feedback; documents revised in light of meetings and community responses. |
| week of 5 June | Facilitator to present draft plan to community. |
| 12-30 June | Facilitator and proponents to prepare first draft of full proposal |
| early July | Facilitator presents initial draft proposal to DEST. |