

Summary of the National Committee for Astronomy meeting 29 November 2005

The National Committee for Astronomy (NCA) met on 29 November 2005 in Canberra. The meeting was chaired by Brian Boyle and attended by Warwick Couch, Mike Dopita, Anne Green, Andrew Melatos, Penny Sackett, Matthew Bailes and Jeanette Mill (from the Academy). Anne Barends took the minutes.

The meeting considered a range of issues, and spent most time on issues relating to NCRIS.

Each meeting, the NCA considers reports from its subcommittees, namely ASKACC and the ELTWG. In this meeting the chair acknowledged Australia's strong representation in Pune for the SKA meeting and the activities concerning the site submission bid. The ELTWG is concentrating its efforts on the Giant Magellan Telescope. Since February 2005 Australia has had observer status on the GMT board and all major committees, and is cultivating a relationship with Sinclair Knight Merz, an engineering firm.

The Decadal plan was successfully launched on Nov 24 at the Shine Dome. The launch was attended by representatives from DEST, DITR and the ARC, as well as the astronomical community. The NCA formally discharged the editorial board from its duties and thanked them for their contribution. Residual monies from production of the decadal plan would be used to further promote it.

The NCRIS response dominated proceedings. Major issues discussed were the maintenance and support of University infrastructure from NCRIS, and the ELTs, plus Antarctica. These discussions continued offline. The final response was submitted by the NCA chair. The NCA received a lot of comments from the community, and many views were very strongly held both from within and external to the NCA. The NCA trusts that the final response both represents the views of the wider community and provides a way forward on contentious issues. People worked very hard to gain consensus and were positive about the final wordings and outcomes.

The IAU's general assembly will be held in Prague next year. The current list of Australian IAU members needs to be updated. Nominations will be requested shortly.

The NCA noted that the ASA would be held in Canberra next July 3-7 hosted by ADFA.

The NCA membership was discussed, especially the large number (4) of ex-officio members. It was decided that the ex-officio members were to be retained (heads of RSAA, ATNF and the AAO and the ASA president), but efforts were to be made to keep the process of the other elected members as transparent as possible, including seeking diversity of experience and association. The process will be outlined at the next ASA meeting in Canberra.

In 2006 it will be 400 years since the Dutch landed on the west coast of Australia. The Dutch NCA is keen to have an exchange of lecturers and pursue other possibilities, such as money for scientific exchanges. Lack of funds on both sides of the world has conspired to mean activities will be confined to guest lectures.

[Since the meeting, the NCA has been informed that Prof Ed van den Heuvel will tour Australia and give some guest lectures. Ed is a keen history buff and discussed the Dutch visit to Australia at his recent 65th birthday symposium.]

The NCA also approved its report on activities to the Academy for 2005 and its work plan for 2006, both of which are now available from the NCA's WWW page.

Matthew Bailes
NCA Vice-Chair