Future ATNF Operations
ATNF response to community feedback

In February 2008, the ATNF released a document, *Future ATNF Operations (version 1)*, outlining plans for the future operations of its radio astronomy facilities. This led to extensive discussion within the community. A summary of the feedback provided to the ATNF and the ATNF Users Committee has been compiled by Jessica Chapman (ATNF) and Elaine Sadler (University of Sydney and Chair of the ATNF Users Committee)[1].

Here we provide a response, on behalf of the ATNF, to the feedback received so far. We do not give detailed point-by-point replies to all of the comments made by individuals and groups, but instead make some remarks on the broad issues raised. We note firstly that final decisions have not yet been made on many aspects of the future operations plans. The ATNF will provide updated versions of *Future ATNF Operations* and will continue to engage with the community as the plans evolve. Input from the community has been, and will continue to be, a vital part of this ongoing planning process. Version 2 of *Future ATNF Operations* will be released in September 2008. This version will include discussion of the science priorities and information on the current status of the plans. More comprehensive information on the development plans will be included in version 3, which we expect to have available in early 2009.

The user community clearly felt that there had been insufficient consultation from the ATNF during the development of the future operations plans, prior to the release of *Future ATNF Operations (v1)*. The ATNF acknowledges that this, together with the document itself[2], led to a high level of community concern. In response, since February 2008 considerable effort has been made to consult with the community. During March and April, David McConnell, Jessica Chapman and/or Lewis Ball visited astronomy groups in Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Canberra, while from February to May feedback was provided through a web-based Future Operations Discussion Forum. The web forum was of particular value for receiving input from overseas-based observers who could not directly attend the discussions held in Australia. A widely attended discussion took place during an open forum, facilitated by Steven Tingay (Curtin University of Technology), at Marsfield on 19 April 2008. In June 2008, ATNF staff attended the AAS meeting to discuss ATNF plans with the astronomy community there.

The user community has emphasised that it is extremely important that decisions for the future are made within the framework of the science priorities and productivity of the ATNF's facilities. During the last few months discussions and science meetings have been held at several locations in Australia to assist in the identification of the science priorities for the years 2010 – 2015 as the ATNF moves to operating ASKAP in addition to the current facilities. The likely science priorities for this period are discussed in the document *ATNF Science Priorities (v1)*[3] which has been widely distributed. A web forum for feedback on the draft is open until 12 September 2008.

[1] For web links to documents referred to in this response, please see www.atnf.csiro.au/observers/planning.
[2] This document was originally written for discussion with the ATNF Steering Committee, rather than a broader audience.
[3] Released on 11 August 2008.

In *Future ATNF Operations (v1)* a range of measures was proposed to streamline operations and reduce the work load on ATNF operations staff. These include reducing the number of receiver changes at Parkes, possible restrictions to the lengths of the millimetre observing seasons at Mopra and the Compact Array, and changes to Tidbinbilla support for single dish observing. Some changes will be essential in order to deliver four world-class Australian observatories for use by radio astronomers from 2012. However, we emphasize here that decisions on these are not finalized. A revised set of measures, that will include a careful consideration of the science priorities, will be included in *Future ATNF Operations (v3).*

The mooted change of the management structure of the ATNF Operations group, from a 'site-based' structure to a 'function-based' structure, took place on 1 July 2008. In the new structure David McConnell continues to be responsible for the delivery of the effective operation of the ATNF's telescopes while Jessica Chapman is responsible for the Operations staff and capabilities. Operations activities are now managed through two 'streams', Engineering Operations and Science Operations, led by Brett Dawson and Phil Edwards respectively. It is a tribute to the ATNF operations staff that this major change has occurred without any significant interruption to the delivery of world-class radio astronomy facilities.

The importance of continuing to provide the high level of scientific and technical expertise previously provided by the Officers-in-Charge has been of significant concern to some users. In the new structure this expertise is distributed across several Observatory staff. The Site Manager and Technical Coordinator are responsible for site-specific requirements including safety, while expert systems knowledge and observing support will be provided by a Senior System Scientist backed up by other operations staff. To provide the necessary level of support and expertise, the ATNF is establishing two new positions for Senior Systems Scientists, with one located at the Parkes Observatory and one at the Narrabri Observatory. An extensive and proactive international search for applicants for these positions has been held and the process of filling these positions is well advanced. Both of the previous Officers-in-Charge will relocate at a later date to Sydney but will continue to provide some scientific and technical support to the Observatories, in addition to other responsibilities. The changes in the operations structure are intended, in part, to provide a sustainable structure where expertise is distributed more widely across Observatory staff, so that our operations are more robust against changes to the roles of individuals.

A wide range of input was received regarding the observing model and the extent to which observations will be taken either at the Observatories, from a Science Operations Centre (SOC), or from other remote locations. Careful planning will be needed to get the balance right between the different observing modes and the input from users will help establish this balance. For Sydney-based observations, the intention is that the Science Operations Centre will provide a quiet, focused working environment for observers and other visitors, with extensive ATNF staff and on-call support, and on-site facilities for accommodation and meals.

Further planning is also needed to refine the level and type of observing support that will be provided at the SOC and we will consult with the community as this is further developed. At present Duty Astronomer support is provided for Compact Array observers with limited support for Mopra observers based at Narrabri. For the SOC, we plan to extend this to providing similar Duty Astronomer support for the Compact Array, Mopra and Parkes, including on-call night-time support.

Finally, it is clear that the community places a very high value on the training and inspiring of postgraduate students of astronomy and related disciplines such as engineering. Many noted the benefits students have received through their participation in the Duty Astronomy program and

through their visits to the Observatories. Student training is also a key priority for the ATNF. The ATNF is committed to continuing to support the development of future generations of scientists and will support student visits to the Observatories for observations and other training opportunities. We also see value in students interacting with astronomers and other experts at the SOC and expect that student visits to the SOC will also play a significant role in their training. We will continue to encourage graduate students to provide support for observers and, as at present, the ATNF will provide travel and accommodation funding to enable this. The intention to expand Duty Astronomer support to Mopra and Parkes users is likely to mean even greater opportunities for student development through this activity.

Once again, we thank the community for their valued engagement with the Australia Telescope National Facility.

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on behalf of the ATNF
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