

OPTICON Executive Meeting

Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2013

**Attendees:** Johannes Andersen (NOTSA), David Barrado (CSIC), Jean-Luc Beuzit (CNRS), Wilfried Boland (NOVA), John Davies (OPTICON PS), Gerry Gilmore (Chair), Norbert Hubin (ESO), Gudrun Pebody (Admin), Salvatore Sciortino (INAF), Rowena Sirey (ESO), Colin Vincent (STFC)

**Apologies:** Roland Gredel (MPG), Denis Mourard (CNRS), Richard Myers (UDUR), Rafael Rebolo (IAC), Paolo Vettolani (INAF), Filippo Zerbi (INAF)



The meeting started with a tour of the magnificent Royal Palace and Palatine Chapel.

The following papers had been circulated prior to the meeting:

Draft Agenda – for adoption

Minutes of Lake Como Board Meeting: agreed, for note

Konkoly new partner proposal from WP 5 lead – for decision FP7-1 draft Final Report to EC – for note and comment

FP7-1 financial outcome report – for discussion and decision

FP7-2 Project Scientist's activity Report – for presentation, note, & comment FP7-2 TNA status report for discussion & decision

FP7-2 Telescope plan summary, background to TNA agenda item

1) Agenda, Apologies, Minutes, Management Update (Gerry Gilmore)

Gerry Gilmore, Chair, welcomed the attendees of the 2nd Executive Meeting of the OPTICON FP7 -2 programme and introduced Gudrun Pebody, the new OPTICON administrator.

No changes were made to the Agenda.

It was agreed that an OPTICON Board Meeting would be held in the late spring 2014.

## 2) Proposed new partner: Konkoly Observatory (Gerry Gilmore)

GG presented the request by the PI of WP5 to make the Konkoly Institute in Budapest a formal member of OPTICON FP7.

The proposal was accepted unanimously.

Action: GG to circulate the proposal to all Board members for approval.

## 3) FP7-1 Final Report and Financial outcome(s) (John Davies)

The final report for OPTICON FP7-1 is now complete and all financial claims put together amount to €11.75 million versus a budget of €10 million.

JKD presented different ways of representing the (over)spend per partner and per WP, reflecting changes in the original budget and in the originally planned user fee distribution. This initiated a discussion as to what should be the basis for the distribution of the final payment among partners, and for any surplus if applicable.

The following points were made:

- The overspend in JRAs was predictable and is due to under-funding rather than mis-management of allocated funds. Most partners decided to report actual costs rather than proportions of EU budget spent. It was pointed out that this strategy should be made very clear in any explanation to the EU about the use / overspend of funds.
- The TNA budget is on the whole underspent but planned allocations were modified through the introduction of the CTAC, leading to Work Package 7 overspends for some agencies and underspends for others.
- No allowances were made in the original project budget distribution to reflect the changes in allocation through the introduction of the CTAC.
- The failure of the first FP7 extension proposal led to some telescope directors agreeing to modify (reduce) the originally planned user fees in the final year to keep the TNA programme going.

The discussion focused on the question whether to pay the agencies the originally planned allocation price or the modified budget, taking into account the perturbations introduced by both the CTAC allocations and the half price offers in the final year. It was decided to make the final payment to agencies in line with the actual allocations and take into account the modified price where applicable.

A decision on how to distribute any surplus after the final payment was postponed. The options discussed so far were: compensating a partner penalised by an internal audit, re-investing in TNA, compensating JRA overspends.

## 4) FP7-2 Project activity report (John Davies)

Work in all WPs is on schedule and going well. All Month 12 deliverables are on track or only slightly behind schedule, and there is no overall impact from the delayed ones.

There is a new activity in FP7-2, "Time Domain Astronomy": Gaia Alerts

Minor changes (redeployment of efforts) were identified in WP1

It was pointed out that a distinction needs to be made in WP2 between the part of the programme which is paid for by ESO and that paid from the OPTICON grant.

## 5) TNA Activity – Progress and future strategy (John Davies)

The TNA activity on the new contract is going well, led by a dynamic positive group and overseen by the Telescope Directors' Forum (although there has been no TDF meeting since the start of the new contract). With 6.5 times more requests than budget available, the programme is heavily oversubscribed. The discussion focused on the way forward for TNA in the light of oversubscription and budgetary constraints.

The following points were made:

- The programme is fine as it is for the next 2 to 3 years, but may then need to adapt to changes and focus more on small and robotic telescopes.
- A different approach to telescopes might find more/renewed interest with the EC and should be considered for future applications.
- The CTAC shows what the demand really is. In the most recent round a small number of projects requiring large telescopes quickly exhausted the available budget.
- Selections for telescope time should be made on the basis of scientific criteria, regardless of the size/type of telescope required. "Relevant science" should be the determining factor. Support should be removed where there is less relevance. No political decisions should be made to weight the allocations with respect to any particular telescope or class of telescopes.
- The TNA Work Package is essential to a proposal for funding, and for any future application the TNA programme will need to be credible and in line with new EC guidelines.

The concluding comments focused on the need to re-think the TNA programme within the next 2-3 years.



## 6) OPTICON in HORIZON 2020 – Identifying a new management

The emphasis in the Horizon 2020 programme is on “new” topics rather than continuation of existing ones, and an application for further funding will need to take that into account.

GG invited all attendees to come forward with suggestions for a new management team, to take over from the existing one.

All were strongly in favour of OPTICON continuing, although at this stage nobody was able to commit to the project leadership. Some suggestions were made for changes to the programme format, in line with the need for a modified TNA programme as described above and with the guidelines of Horizon 2020. A possible “new” emphasis would be on networks of small robotic all-sky telescopes and the associated big data issues.

## 7) AOB & next meeting

GG thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting, in particular Johannes Andersen for standing in for his successor Thomas Augusteijn.

An OPTICON Board Meeting will be held in the late spring 2014.



Background to the meeting: the original Leopard's telescope