

## Minutes of OPTICON Telescope Directors Forum

Wed 27<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Sala de Instrumentacion. IAC La Laguna, Tenerife

A Adamson	E Oliva
A Oscoz	W Schmidt
B Gelly	U Thiele
C Goudis	A Sosa
M Dennefeld	S Brierley [mins]
F Bettonvil	C Veillet
J Andersen	D Kiselman
J Burgos	A Sosa
J Davies [Chair]	P Boumis
H Holties - ASTRON	I Skillen -ING
B. Nordstrom	R Rutten

### 1) Apologies and Introductions

W Schmidt represented KIS in place of O vd Luehe, U Thiele represented CAHA in place of J Alves, D Kiselman represented SST in place of G Scharmar. M Colless of AAO and M Bode of LT were available by telephone. M Dennefeld represented Michel Boer as well as his own role in the N6.3 activity.

Apologies were received from J. Melnick, D. Carter, D. Mouillet. M Boer.

H Holties from ASTRON attended the meeting to present and discuss the Common Proposal Tool. Ian Skillen of the ING attended the meeting for this item.

### 2) Adoption of agenda

The agenda item to 'review remaining 2006 allocations' was withdrawn as no longer relevant.

### 3) Minutes and Actions from last meeting (JKD)

The Minutes from the TDF meeting in Paris, 2005, which had been circulated after the meeting, were accepted.

Update on Action items from TDF Meeting, Paris, 2005.

*Action 1: consider sending someone from their staff to participate as a lecturer or tutor in one of the NEON schools*

M Dennefeld reported that there had been some participation in the NEON schools as a result of this action. J Davies again encouraged telescope staff and directors to consider participating in future NEON schools. Action CLOSED.

*Action 2: Feedback on Telescope Network Peer Review procedures document*

The Telescope Network Peer Review document was implemented for the peer review of the Liverpool Telescope. Action CLOSED.

*Action 3: D Mouillet to head up working group to draw up requirements document for common proposal tool*

The Common Proposal Tool Working Group Requirements Document exists as version 0.3

*Action 4: Panel to make suggestions for new tasks to be performed by the Access Office*

Suggestions were received which included savings that could be made in terms of manpower, and for the Access Office to spearhead the development of the common proposal tool. Action CLOSED.

*Action 5: J Davies will calculate how much money has been saved and how much could be allocated to other telescopes, with some weighting in favour of the WHT.*

JKD completed this action shortly after last meeting in 2005. Action CLOSED.

*Action 6: J Davies to consider terms of reference for an external review and what kind of review it might be and propose these ideas to the forum*

No external review has been arranged yet. J Davies said he was happy to revisit this item for discussion during the Agenda item on FP7. A midterm review of the entire OPTICON programme is scheduled whereby the EC will examine completed annual reports and send a representative to one of the Board Meetings. Action ONGOING.

#### **4) Accession of LT and Aristarchos**

##### **Liverpool Telescope**

As the LT and Aristarcos Telescopes were not completed at the start of the OPTICON FP6 programme, a Peer Review Panel (R Gredel, J Melnick and R Rutten) was appointed to review their accession. The Review of the Liverpool Telescope was successfully completed recently and J Davies therefore recommends that the Liverpool Telescope joins the Access programme as of today. Initially, only the PPARC share (~30%) of the total observing time is open under the programme.

J Davies called Prof Mike Bode and the decision was made that no applications for access to the LT would be accepted in the current (06B) round as there was not enough time to advertise the opportunity before the deadline on October 1.

##### **Aristarchos Telescope**

C Goudis gave a presentation on the status of the Aristarchos Telescope for which the final acceptance review is to take place in October 2006 and observing runs to start in July 2007.

J Davies expressed his concern with the timescale for the telescope's accession because the visit of the Peer Review Panel will potentially clash with the calls for proposals. C Goudis asked whether proposals could be accepted under condition of the telescope's acceptance into the programme. However, it was agreed that the best way forward was for the review to be conducted as soon as Aristarchos are ready and if the situation is as straightforward as for the LT, the agreement can be sent by email within a day or two of the assessment.

#### **5) Access report. Progress with the 2006 EC payment, remaining 2006**

## **allocations, budget remaining. (JKD + JB/AS)**

J Davies clarified that the OPTICON Annual Report for 05/06 was resubmitted a few weeks ago after some queries from the EC. The process for reviewing the resubmitted report is taking longer than was previously anticipated but it is hoped that we will be in possession of some of the 06/07 payments before the end of 2006.

Action 1. J Davies asked people to inform him if, prior to the next payments being received, anyone is experiencing financial difficulties.

## **Paper 5c Access Report (link to document circulated).**

A Sosa gave an update on his report that was circulated prior to the meeting. This report confirmed that the budget allocated by the Executive is not enough to support all the eligible proposals. J Davies expressed the importance of the Telescope Directors providing information on all applicants in order to quantify the amount of over-subscription to justify more funds. J Burgos assured the forum that if the information is supplied to the Access Office in any format they will process it.

J Davies noted that there has been some improvement in the uptake of CEE countries. We have continued to promote the programme widely. J Davies visited Poland last year and posters advertising the Access programme were placed at the IAU in Prague. M. Dennefeld presented the Access programme and possibilities to the SREAC (Sub-Regional European Astronomical Committee) meeting in March, where all the south-eastern EU countries were present. If anyone has any new ideas, please pass them on.

Action 2. All – forward ideas on ways to promote the Access programme to A Sosa/J Davies

M Dennefeld suggested that our publicity should include details on the instrumentation and performances of the various telescopes.

## **6) Development of a proposed spending profile for the rest of FP6 ahead of the board meeting (JKD).**

### **Paper 5a Table of 2006 allocations so far (circulated)**

### **The spreadsheet of nights used and original profile remaining to end 2007 was circulated prior to the meeting (Paper 5b)**

J Davies presented various scenarios for the proposed spending profile for the rest of the FP6 Programme and asked for input to finalise the profile ahead of the Board Meeting in October. The options included carrying over unallocated nights at each telescope or re-allocating the unspent money as extra nights at different telescopes.

T Oliva asked for a more scientific weighting to be used in calculating the payment structure based on whether all eligible proposals had been approved (real life demand) and J Davies agreed that it was a good suggestion and could be done.

The Telescope Directors decided to manage the activity so as maintain the spending profile at 80% of the 5-year total at the end of 2007 and 100% at the end of 2008, as

there is the prospect of attracting further new users to the programme in 2008. Also we wish to avoid losing users in the case of a funding gap in 2008.

**Action 3. J Davies to provide calculation for spending profile for 80% allocation to end of 2007, taking into account the 'real-life' demand for telescope nights, to present to the Board**

## **7) Further evaluation of the common proposal submission system options.**

ASTRON have developed a common proposal submission system called NorthStar as part of the EC-funded RadioNet project. H Holties presented a customised module for demonstration to the OPTICON Telescope Directors. There is a website available for people to look around: <http://Proposal.astron.nl>.

A Adamson commented on the Northstar module for UKIRT and said it has been very straightforward. The tool is dealing with the monthly deadlines and a continuing series of proposal submissions well and UKIRT propose to go ahead with implementing it in November. Thereafter it will be used for PATT proposals.

J Davies commented that a proposal submission tool for CCI time has been developed at the IAC. From a user point of view it looks similar to Northstar but it is designed to deal with fewer proposals. The Northstar system has greater functionality as it also supports the TAC review process.

J Davies said that this trial module that has been developed by ASTRON will be paid out of TDF funds. If the forum agree to move forward with its development, some more work can be funded out of the existing budget and thereafter we can start investigating the longer term financial issues should telescopes wish to proceed. There are no intellectual property rights issues with RadioNet. The maintenance costs could be shared, but nothing is defined as yet. A Adamson said the module for UKIRT cost \$8k (one-off fee).

J Andersen said that currently NOT would not be interested in putting resources into such a tool. B Goudis for Aristarchos said that if it were available, the telescope would adopt it next year. C Veillet said he believed this tool is worth looking into more as he likes the review process which doesn't exist in his current system. M Dennefeld said that OHP and TBL don't have a web interface yet but are considering it for the future.

A tool such as Northstar would need to be taken up by a considerable number of telescopes to make a difference. T Oliva suggested it is difficult to have the local TACs swallowing a change of this size. However, it is the solution that has to be taken if there is to be an OPTICON time allocation with a common OPTICON TAC.

J Davies stated that the decision to adopt such a tool cannot wait until FP7. Without wishing to unduly pressure anyone into adopting a common proposal now, he still believes a commonly maintained tool is better for everyone concerned. However, the national allocation committees may not agree and therefore there is no doubt the issue should be discussed within the national communities.

R Rutten stated that the ING has to use 4 different systems and therefore any normalisation would be extremely agreeable. There is clearly room for improvement

and this common proposal tool would probably be easy to implement. Additionally, the Access Programme can show it off as a real achievement at the end of FP6 and it would have excellent visibility in the astronomical community. M. Dennefeld fully concurred with RR's view, adding that the EU would be sensitive to every effort made to better integrate the communities across Europe, and a common proposal tool was certainly one of the major steps to overcome possible reluctance from potential new users.

U Thieles commented that he agreed with M Dennefeld's perspective as they use an old fashioned system which, while he sees no need for immediate change, he believes can be improved on and if it could be a common system for OPTICON he would use it.

J Davies replied that if the programme moves forward with a common TAC then a common system is required. The outstanding question is would this be a problem for some telescopes? J Andersen will take this discussion to his nationally community and he also wants to discuss possible long-term consequences in the way we run the telescopes, thereafter reporting by the end of the year. J Davies agreed this was a good idea.

Questions also arose about the location of the database and whether this would be centralised. Technically it is possible to support it locally and also a local copy can be downloaded during the proposal preparation phase. Most of the proposal preparation can be done offline.

J Andersen said the commonality of the submission interface is in fact a fairly minor part of a proposal management system that feeds into the planning and operation of the telescope. He thinks a technical meeting held in a month or two advisable and J Davies agreed – saying there would be some funds to arrange travel to discuss the feasibility of such a tool. J Davies asked if perhaps Ian Skillen would coordinate the meeting and discussion as he himself does not have the technical know-how. M Dennefeld agreed with the process but he believes we should think very carefully about the long-term maintenance issues of the tool. JKD said the RadioNet are also faced with these issues.

Action 4. Telescopes to talk informally and then contact J Davies about arranging a meeting sometime in the future.

## **8) Update on EU progress towards FP7. (JKD)**

J Davies gave a presentation entitled 'Towards FP7'. The key issues are that the funds available are likely to be of the same order as in FP6 and the call for proposals is likely to be late 2007, about 1 year from now, with contracts starting in late 2008/early 2009.

## **9) Access programme in FP7 (JKD + RR and all)**

R Rutten gave a talk at the Edinburgh FP7 planning meeting and on the basis of that and some other discussions, J Davies wrote the paper which he circulated prior to this meeting containing FP7 ideas. Some comments have already been forwarded to him.

M Dennefeld said the Access programme is an important part of the proposal and an international TAC is interesting especially as it would lead to rationalisation of equipment plus homogenisation of proposals J Andersen said there was no question there would not be an Access programme, but what it will be is a different matter.

J Davies said that how the programme will look in FP7 has to be presented to the Board in October and therefore the process of getting to this stage has to be considered in some detail. J Andersen stated that we should emphasise the success of the FP6 Access programme; the telescopes could have provided lots more access as the need is demonstrably there. He has no strong suggestions on CPT or common TAC but we will address some of the inefficiencies that experience has taught us over last few years.

**Central European telescopes:** B Nordstrom, J Davies and J Andersen discussed the telescopes of CE Europe, in particular the 2m telescopes of Eastern Europe which should be considered for FP7. J Andersen believes the original set of criteria was quite reasonable for optical and solar telescopes and those criteria could be combined with reviewing the CE Europe telescopes. However, some funding, for example for upgrades, could be extended to other CE Europe telescopes, focussing on the special features of each.

**Common TAC:** J Davies does not think the EC are against this. J Andersen, however, believes it is a good way to create more work without any extra benefits. M Dennefeld suggested it is more complex and there may be some positives. T Oliva and J Burgos expressed doubts as we have to consider telescopes outside OPTICON. J Andersen would like to move away from the idea of a 'super-TAC' but M. Dennefeld noted that a single TAC for multiple telescopes was working fine in the southern hemisphere with ESO, admittedly with telescopes all located in a single observatory. There was no reason we could not achieve this in the north, by having a TAC similar to the one at ESO, with several thematic sub-panels. It could be tested first in smaller scale with the Opticon time, before eventually moving to a unique TAC for all the time, national time included; he believes that the French community may not be averse to this idea. A positive aspect of a common TAC would be to smooth out differences in proposal assessment due to inhomogeneous weights given to different aspects of a proposal, national differences, or language barriers, while individual sensitivities could still be represented in the composition of the panels.

R Rutten believes the Access programme has an opportunity here to take a step, albeit a risky one, to build up something truly European. He suggested we have to decide whether it is something we jump for or not but he thinks the benefits outweigh the negatives. Interestingly, in Edinburgh nobody objected to his presentation where he made those views known. J Andersen said that he does not believe the jump can be made too quickly and that the idea of a common TAC is 'too much too soon' and as a first step inroads can and should be made in terms of extending links within the new EC community. R Rutten on the other hand believes we should start with a global vision as one day people will ask why we are running this programme.

SUMMARY:

R Rutten said that we need to define the parameters for taking this discussion forward, of which he has noted four:

1. proposal submission
2. coordinated instrument suite – which combination of telescopes and instruments (instrument rationalisation)
3. process of time allocation – TAC/super TAC
4. how much time is going into this pot and do we want to ask the national funding agencies if they want to put their time into it.

R Rutten stated he would be happy if we conducted this discussion in the timeframe of a year. However, we need to set a roadmap to tackle these issues and sooner rather than later approach the agencies and present our findings to find out what they think. It is then that we will hopefully be able to make real progress. A set of sub groups will be defined to look at all the above areas of discussion. These are defined as follows:

1. Proposal submission: R Rutten will ask Ian Skillen if he will help with the discussion of a Common Proposal Tool.

2. M Dennefeld will finalise his overview of the actual instrument situation. The group will then have to come up with a preliminary instrumentation plan for the future, to be discussed in the TDF J Andersen will also join the instrumentation committee.

3. J Davies will start the discussions on TACs and time allocation

J Davies will put to the Board that there is a process to approve a plan for the future of the Access programme, which is all he had hoped to take forward to them.

### **FP7 proposal for Enhancement network**

B Nordstrom thinks an Enhancement programme is very important as part of the Access programme, because actual experience with modern observatories is needed by many before they are motivated to actually apply for time. What J Davies discovered at the RadioNet meeting is that there are a large number of workshops and meetings. The only thing which is not allowed is to train students, but we can provide workshops for astronomers or engineers at more senior levels. MD noted that such workshops are already planned for the last years of the present programme, the only limitation at the moment being the manpower willing to participate in their organisation.

Action 5. M Dennefeld and J Davies will investigate options for Enhancement activities

### **10) A proposed FP7 Activity for a common approach to Phase II software (JKD)**

There is an FP7 network proposal for coordinated approaches to Phase 1 and Phase 2 tools. If anyone is interested in talking about this let J Davies know or contact Hanno Holties at ASTRON or Alan Bridger at the UK ATC directly.

### **11) E-STAR**

This project has contacted G Gilmore as regards bringing this into the OPTICON FP7 proposal.

## **11) AOB**

There was general agreement that a meeting should be held in the Spring (around April) and then, in principle, there should be a meeting the following September, possibly in Greece.

A Adamson announced that this would probably be his last meeting as Gary Davis will be taking over the OPTICON part of the work.

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