



SKA Organisation

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Notes from the Chair of the SKA Board

32nd Meeting of the Board of Directors of SKA Organisation held by Video Conference 21 May 2020

Dr Catherine Cesarsky, Chair of the Board, welcomed directors and invited guests to the 32nd Meeting of the Board of Directors of SKA Organisation. There was Board representation from Australia, Canada, China, India, Italy, Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Invited guests included representatives of the Council Preparatory Task Force (CPTF), Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia (Spain), National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, Science and Technology Facilities Council (UK), SKA Finance Committee and SKA Regional Centres Steering Committee (SRCSC).

Administration and Governance

Prof. Philip Diamond, Director-General, reported on the current situation due to COVID-19; the HQ remains closed after 9 weeks of UK-wide lockdown. The closure is extended to 1 June at the earliest but preparations are underway for a return to the HQ as soon as safe and practical. All travel is in abeyance and will be reviewed later in the year, when only mission-critical activity will be considered. The health and wellbeing of all staff members remains paramount to further planning.

Prof. Diamond commented on the successful recruitment of seven new starters since the shutdown of the HQ. All new staff, including several from overseas who will re-locate to the UK at a later date, have been remotely inducted into the company. Further critical recruitment will continue to take place throughout the year.

Ms Fiona Davenport provided an HR update on progress on developing HR policies for the SKA Observatory. An HR Working Group, which includes several representatives from different member countries, has been working to progress the preparations for transition to the SKA Observatory. The draft policies will be reviewed by the Council Preparatory Task Force (CPTF) in June 2020, finalised over the (northern) summer period for completion of the full framework of policies by September 2020.

Prof. Diamond appraised the Board on the work currently taking place to investigate the potential impact on SKA1 of the various current and planned low earth orbit satellite mega-constellations. The SKA is currently working alongside colleagues in South Africa and Australia on developing a spectrum management strategy. Elements of the plan include: working with both external stakeholders to advance SKA interests and with broader radio astronomy services to support regulatory and mitigation initiatives.



Finance

The Board received a report from Mr David Luchetti, Chair of the Finance Committee, on the outcomes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 12 May 2020, including the Committee's review of the revised 2020 Budget and the draft 2021 Business Plan. The revision of this year's budget, which incorporates a range of cost saving measures in the light of the COVID-19 crisis, was approved by the Board. The Board noted that the latest cash flow forecast shows a projected closing cash balance in December 2020 of around £3.9M.

Engineering

Dr Joseph McMullin, Programme Director and Deputy Director-General, presented an update on construction planning covering bridging activities, the recent external cost review, and the preparation of the Construction Proposal. The external cost review panel, comprising independent experts, examined the planned expenditure of the project and made a number of recommendations covering cost, risk, and schedule. Following an extensive review process, the panel confirmed the rigour and quality of the work carried out to date. The Construction Proposal will be submitted to the Board for endorsement at the 34th Board meeting in September 2020 and then to the SKA Observatory Council for consideration and approval.

Operations

Dr Lewis Ball, Director of Operations, presented the progress on developing the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan. This 10-year plan covers Observatory Operations, Business Enabling functions and the SKA Observatory Development Programme. An external review of the Observatory Operations aspect of the plan has been completed and an external review of the Business-Enabling functions is scheduled for early-July 2020. The Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan will be submitted to the Board for endorsement at the 34th Board meeting in September 2020 and then to the SKA Observatory Council for consideration and approval.

The Board received a presentation from Prof. Peter Quinn, Chair of the SKA Regional Centres Steering Committee (SRCSC), who provided an update on the SRCSC's work since the Board meeting in November 2019, together with a SRC White Paper. This White Paper, which set out proposals for the governance, functionality, participation and cost of the SRC network, was endorsed by the Board, subject to further work being carried out to agree the governance model. The Board also noted that the SRC Network is critical to the delivery of SKA science, and strongly supported the establishment of the proposed Working Groups to further develop the details for the implementation of the SRC network

Science

Prof. Robert Braun, Director of Science, reported on the activities of the Science Team since the last Board meeting in November 2019. Prof. Braun shared plans regarding the next science meeting, originally scheduled to take place in September 2020 but now planned for March 2021. This science meeting, entitled 'The Precursor View of the SKA Sky', will highlight the scientific productivity of the SKA Precursor telescopes. The balance between physical and virtual elements of the meeting are currently under consideration, and the degree of virtual presence will strongly influence the choice of physical venue.

The Board was informed about SKA Data Challenge #2. This will have the added innovation of providing access to the large simulated data cubes through computing facilities in SKA partner countries.



Further information about the membership and activities of the SKA's Science Working Groups can be found on the SKA Website [here](#).

Policy

Prof. Diamond updated the Board on the recent work regarding scenario planning in light of the current COVID-19 situation. A working group, including representatives from the SKA Office and the SKA host sites, is reviewing a range of future scenarios for the project, recognising the importance of establishing an operational SKA Observatory and commencing construction activities as soon as possible.

A draft of the 2021 Business Plan was reviewed by the Board; this document takes into account an anticipated delay of 6-months to the project arising from the global COVID-19 crisis. The plan was received favourably by the Board, and with a few amendments stemming from the discussion with Board and Finance Committee, it will be submitted for approval at the next Board meeting.

Ms Patricia Kelly, Chair of the Council Preparatory Task Force, provided an update on the CPTF's outstanding priorities and tasks in the run-up to establishment of the SKA Observatory. Key priorities for the CPTF include funding for the SKA Observatory and the development of procurement plans in preparation for start of construction. Ms Kelly shared a new timetable for the remaining tasks, taking into account the expanded timeframes due to COVID-19.

Ms Theresa Devaney, Head of Business Development and Change, presented an update on the current status of transition planning activities. The Board noted that the ratification of the Observatory Convention and UK Headquarters Agreement is delayed owing to the COVID-19 crisis. The subsequent delay to the timeline for transition from SKA Organisation to the SKA Observatory means that the company is expected to remain a legal and operational entity into 2021.

The preparations for transition continue in line with the governance timetable, and the agendas of the remaining CPTF meetings in 2020 will focus on endorsement of policies and other founding matters for consideration at the first SKA Observatory Council meeting. The aim remains to transition from SKA Organisation to the SKA Observatory at the earliest opportunity.

Future Board Meetings

The next meeting of the Board will be on 14 July 2020, via video conference. Further Board meetings are also planned for 17-18 September and 7-8 December 2020.

Catherine Cesarsky
Chair, SKA Board of Directors
29 May 2020