



SKA Organisation

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Notes from the Chair of the SKA Board

33rd Meeting of the Board of Directors of SKA Organisation held by Video-Conference on 14 July 2020

Dr Catherine Cesarsky, Chair of the Board, welcomed directors and invited guests to the 33rd Meeting of the Board of Directors of SKA Organisation. There was Board representation from Australia, Canada, China, India, Italy, The Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Invited guests included representatives from the Council Preparatory Task Force (CPTF), Department of Science and Innovation (South Africa), European Commission, Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia (Spain), Korea Astronomy and Space Science Institute, Max Planck Society, National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, Science and Technology Facilities Council (UK), SKA Finance Committee, SKA Regional Centres Steering Committee (SRCSC), State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Switzerland).

Administration and Governance

Prof. Philip Diamond, Director-General, reported on the current situation due to COVID-19; the SKA HQ has commenced a phased re-opening of the building and, in the initial phase, staff are being invited to return to the office on a voluntary basis. The SKA HQ building has been sanitised and all health and safety precautions are in place. The health and wellbeing of all staff members remains paramount to future planning; a continual review of the situation will take place and any further measures required will be acted upon immediately.

Prof. Diamond commented on the recent virtual European Astronomical Society conference (EAS 2020), held from 29 June to 3 July 2020, at which several of our staff contributed. The SKA hosted a virtual booth at the conference and Prof. Diamond presented a plenary session on Science, Technology, and the SKA.

Ms Fiona Davenport, Head of HR, spoke about recent recruitment within SKA Organisation. She commented that 19 roles have been recruited to date in 2020, 14 candidates have joined the organisation, 8 of those individuals have started remotely due to the current coronavirus crisis.

Ms Davenport provided an update on the HR policy development for the SKA Observatory; 18 of the 25 policies are currently being socialised with stakeholders and were reviewed by the Council Preparatory Task Force (CPTF) at its meeting in June 2020. The HR Working Group, comprising several representatives from member countries, is continuing to work with the feedback received to improve the policies. Ms Davenport also updated the Board on planning for the transfer of staff from SKA Organisation to the SKA Observatory under the UK's Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, commonly known as "TUPE".

The Board held an election for the office of Vice-Chair of the SKA Board of Directors and voted unanimously to re-elect Prof. Lars Börjesson (Chalmers University of Technology) for a further term.



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 16 June 2020, including the external audit findings report by RSM UK Audit LLP and Report and Financial Statements for the period ending 31 December 2019. The Committee also reviewed the draft 2021 Business Plan and recommended its approval by the Board. The Board noted that the latest cash flow forecast shows a healthy projected closing cash balance in December 2020.

Dr Lewis Ball, Director of Operations, presented the 2021 Business Plan and explained the scope of the document with reference to the transition to the SKA Observatory, construction preparation and the ramp-up of operations over the 10 years. The 2021 Business Plan was approved unanimously by the Board by Special Resolution. The Board recommended approval by Members of the proposed level of funding contributions for 2021.

Construction Proposal

Dr Joseph McMullin, Programme Director and Deputy Director-General, presented an exposure draft of the SKA-1 Construction Proposal. Dr McMullin reviewed the key sections of the document and clarified the scope of the project. The Board felt that the draft document provides a firm foundation, bringing together years of work and experience and sets out a compelling story for the SKA, and that it is worthwhile that it includes a section on the broader socio-economic impacts of the project in Member countries.

The exposure drafts of the SKA-1 Construction Proposal and the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan were released to the Board in order to encourage feedback in advance of formal submission for endorsement at the next Board meeting. These documents represent a huge amount of work over a number of years by many people, including SKA staff and personnel from partner organisations.

Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan

Dr Ball presented an exposure draft of the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan. This 10-year plan includes Observatory Operations, Business-Enabling functions and the SKA Observatory Development Programme. An external review of the Business-Enabling Plan was conducted on 8 July 2020. Dr Ball shared the initial feedback from the panel, whose final report is due by 22 July 2020; any updates to the plan will be incorporated into the final document. The Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan will be submitted to the Board for endorsement at the 34th Board meeting in September 2020 and then forwarded to the SKA Observatory Council for consideration and approval.

SKA Regional Centres

The Board received a presentation from Prof. Peter Quinn, Chair of the SKA Regional Centres Steering Committee (SRCSC). Prof. Quinn provided an update to the SRC White Paper that was approved by the Board at its last meeting. The update further expanded on areas of the SRC network such as governance and responsibilities. Further discussion will take place at the next Board meeting.



Satellite mega-constellations

Mr Federico di Vruno, RFI & EMC Domain Specialist and Acting Spectrum Manager, Mr Tim Stevenson, Head of Mission Assurance, and Robert Braun, Science Director, presented the findings of recent work by the SKA on satellite mega-constellations, including the potential impact of current and planned low earth orbit satellite systems on the SKA and possible mitigations. The Board was informed that public communications on this topic will be made shortly.

Policy

Ms Patricia Kelly, Chair of the CPTF, provided an update on the Task Force's outstanding priorities and tasks in the run-up to the establishment of the SKA Observatory. Key priorities for the CPTF include ratification of the SKA Observatory Convention, funding, procurement and policies. Ms Kelly set out the current schedule for ratification by signatories of the SKA Observatory Convention and she felt that sufficient number of Members will have ratified by October 2020 that the inaugural SKA Observatory Council meeting could be held in 2020Q4.

Ms Theresa Devaney, Head of Business Development and Change, presented an update on the current status of transition planning activities. The Board noted the risks outlined in the presentation including potential delay to ratification of the SKA Observatory Convention owing to the coronavirus crisis. The ongoing impact of coronavirus is being monitored in terms of people, planning and efficiency.

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

Future Board Meetings

The next meeting of the SKA Board will be held by video-conference on 17-18 September 2020. This will be followed by a further Board meeting on 7-8 December 2020.

Catherine Cesarsky
Chair, SKA Board of Directors
20 July 2020