



SKA Organisation

Jodrell Bank Observatory
Lower Withington
Macclesfield
Cheshire, SK11 9DL.
UK

t: +44 (0)161 306 9600
e: enquiries@skatelescope.org
w: www.skatelescope.org

Notes from the Chair of the SKA Board

34th Meeting of the Board of Directors of SKA Organisation held by Video-Conference on 17 and 18 September 2020

Dr Catherine Cesarsky, Chair of the Board, welcomed directors and invited guests to the 34th 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, National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, National Institute for Astrophysics (Italy), Science and Technology Facilities Council (UK), SKA Finance Committee, SKA HQ, SKA Regional Centres Steering Committee (SRCSC), SKA Science and Engineering Advisory Committee (SEAC), State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Switzerland).

The meeting was opened with a speech by the Chair, noting the recent sad news of the untimely passing of Prof. Nicolò (Nichi) D'Amico, SKA Organisation Board member and President of the National Institute for Astrophysics (INAF), Italy. Dr Filippo Zerbi also said a few words in remembrance of Nichi, which was followed by a minute's silence. The Board's heartfelt condolences go to Nichi's family and to his colleagues at INAF.

This meeting marked a major milestone in the history of the SKA project as the Board endorsed the SKA-1 Construction Proposal and the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan. These documents represent the culmination of many years of hard work by the SKA Office and collaborating partners around the world and provide a firm basis for making the SKA telescopes a reality.

Administration and Governance

Prof. Philip Diamond, Director-General, provided a progress report, including an update on the impact of COVID-19 on activities at SKA HQ. He stated that staff have been invited to return voluntarily to the building, with a number of health and safety precautions being put in place to ensure the safety and comfort of all staff returning to SKA HQ. The situation is under continuous review and any further measures required will be acted upon immediately. No international business travel will take place for the remainder of 2020 and will be reviewed as we enter 2021.

Ms Fiona Davenport, Head of HR, spoke about recent recruitment within SKA Organisation. She reported that 24 roles have been recruited to date in 2020, 13 individuals have taken up post remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 4 of whom have started work outside the UK.

Ms Davenport provided an update on the HR policy development for the SKA Observatory; 24 policies have been drafted for endorsement by the Council Preparatory Task Force (CPTF) at its meeting on 22-23 September 2020. The membership of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group has been refreshed owing to the significant number of new recruits in SKA Organisation. Two meetings of the EDI Working Group have been held over the past month; the outputs from this Working Group will be socialised with staff throughout the year.



The Board was invited to approve the appointment of Roxanne Casemayou as the French National Centre for Scientific Research's (CNRS) representative on the Finance Committee. This appointment was approved unanimously by the Board by Special Resolution.

Policy

Ms Patricia Kelly, Chair of the CPTF, shared a draft outline of the final report from the Task Force that will be provided to the SKA Observatory Council. Ms Kelly reviewed the current schedule for ratification by signatories of the SKA Observatory Convention, it is expected that a sufficient number of Members will have ratified by October 2020 that the inaugural SKA Observatory Council meeting could be held in mid-December 2020 or early-January 2021.

Ms Theresa Devaney, Head of Business Development and Change, presented an update on the current status of transition planning activities, which continue in line with the governance timetable. The Board noted the schedule in relation to the execution of the transition. Following the first meeting of the SKA Observatory Council, staff and other assets from SKA Organisation will be transferred to the SKA Observatory as soon as is practicable, with the date for the transition expected to be between end-March 2021 to early-May 2021.

SKA-1 Construction Proposal and the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan

Prof. Philip Diamond introduced the core document set, comprising the SKA-1 Construction Proposal, the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan and SKA Prospectus 2020. These documents represent a huge amount of work over a number of years by many people, including SKA staff and personnel from partner organisations. Prof. Diamond presented a history of the SKA project from its inception in the late-1980s, through the technology innovations across the SKA project in the 1990s and 2000s, and the development of the science case, to the current period. He noted that the project already has passed numerous internal and external reviews to reach this stage.

Dr Joseph McMullin, Programme Director and Deputy Director-General recounted the various reviews and development history of the SKA-1 Construction Proposal; this document brings together the major outputs from several hundreds of documents that have been produced by SKA staff and colleagues in partner organisations.

Dr Antonio Chrysostomou, Head of Science Operations, presented the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan on behalf of Dr Lewis Ball, Director of Operations, who was unable to attend the meeting in person. This 10-year plan covers Observatory Operations, Business-Enabling functions, and the SKA Observatory Development Programme. Dr Chrysostomou talked about the cost drivers for the project as well as underlying risks. He also reflected upon the independent reviews that have taken place as part of the development of the documentation.

Mr William Garnier, Director of Communications, Outreach and Education, spoke about the broad, non-science impacts of the SKA project, particularly in terms of economy, society, culture and sustainability. The non-science impacts of the project were identified early in the project and are now seen as drivers, rather than consequences, of the project.

Mr Tim Stevenson, Head of Mission Assurance, concluded the SKA Office's presentation of the document set by talking about the Observatory Development Programme, which will support the scientific development of the SKA Observatory over the next 10 years and beyond.

The Board formally endorsed the SKA-1 Construction Proposal, the Observatory Establishment and Delivery Plan and SKA Prospectus 2020, which encapsulate the unprecedented step forward which has been taken to expand radioastronomy capabilities. These documents will be submitted to the SKA Observatory Council, once established, for formal approval.



SKA Regional Centres

Prof. Philip Diamond presented a proposed governance model for the SKA Regional Centre (SRC) Network. He stressed the importance of establishing SRC Working Groups as quickly as possible in order to develop the design and operations plan for the SRC Network. He stated that the SKA Office will begin recruitment of an SRC Architect immediately; the post holder will coordinate the design of the SRC Network in close partnership with national SRC representatives. Prof. Peter Quinn, Chair of the SRC Steering Committee (SRCSC), confirmed the SRCSC's support for the proposed governance model.

The Board endorsed the proposed governance model as a starting point for the evolution of a broad and rich set of partnerships between the SKA Observatory and the community to deliver the SKA end-to-end system. It also agreed to seek and nominate the short-term appointment of personnel to participate in the SRC Working Groups. Further discussion will take place at the next Board meeting.

Spectrum Management

Mr Federico di Vruno, Acting Spectrum Manager, presented the new Spectrum Management Strategy, which takes into account 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 primary goal of the Spectrum Management Strategy is to put in place mitigation measures to minimise the impact of sources of radio frequency interference across the full range of the electromagnetic spectrum in which SKA will operate. The strategy will act at global, regional, and national levels by interacting with, and participating in, communities and groups to facilitate collaboration. It is intended that the SKA will work closely with those industry partners whose technologies have the potential for global impact and represent a risk to SKA operations.

Science

Prof. Robert Braun, Director of Science, reported on the activities of the Science team since the Board meeting in May 2020 (SKA-BD-32). The next SKA Science meeting, entitled "The Precursor View of the SKA Sky" will be held on 15-19 March 2021; this will be a fully virtual conference. Prof. Braun also reviewed the goals of the next Science Data Challenge (SDC2), which will see participants analyse a simulated datacube 1TB in size in order to find and characterise the neutral hydrogen content in galaxies across a sky area of 20 square degrees.

SKA Sites

Reports were provided on activities at the Australian and South African SKA sites, both of which included updates on the impact of COVID-19 and their mitigating strategies going forward.

Future Board Meetings

The next meeting of the SKA Board (SKA-BD-35) will be held by video-conference on 7-8 December 2020.

Catherine Cesarsky
Chair, SKA Board of Directors
25 September 2020