

LRPIC report

The LRPIC was formed in April 2011, and has been in a state of high activity ever since. We had to ramp up fast to meet a pre-arranged date to report to ACCA, and also to participate in the LRP session at CASCA, both in the last week of May. This covered the full range of LRP recommendations. We were plunged into the VLOT issue immediately by the CASCA discussions, and the changes that have happened in both EELT and TMT since the LRP report. We revisited the ESO membership issues, and had a telecon with the senior TMT people in California. We have also been in touch with the DG of ESO. As you will know, the LRPIC has issued some brief reports on the CASCA mailer, and posted more detailed documents on the issues on the CASCA web page, so they will not be recounted in detail in this report.

The LRPIC has had a couple of telecons, and continue an active email discussion weekly, or more often. We have received inputs from several members of the community, and have benefitted particularly from discussions with Greg Fahlman, Luc Simard, Marcin Sawicki, and David Crampton. We work closely with the GAC and JCSA, since they cover subsets of the full LRP. The situation with almost all of the new facilities proposed for the decade are in flux, and need a lot of monitoring. In addition, the political climate for funding expensive new astronomy facilities is very poor at the moment. This makes our task demanding and also daunting.

We have recommended that the TMT Letter Of Agreement be signed and that we stick with that program, without obligation, for the time being. The political and timing obstacles for entering ESO instead, are very unfavourable, and would require abandoning our TMT funding requests. The LOI has been signed and we continue to keep in touch with the TMT project. The future of NSF support is a major issue for TMT, in addition to individual partner funding.

In view of the poor prospects for public funding, the LRPIC has initiated discussions on pursuing private funding. We are in discussion with the ACURA Executive Director to set up a meeting with Jon Dellandrea, who has offered advice from his successful experience, particularly the Perimeter Institute.

We plan to address other aspects of the LRP in the near future, to balance our attentions. We are also involved with, and following the prospects for space astronomy: Astro-H, which is under way; Canadian-led Space Telescope, which has a study beginning; and Euclid, where we are in discussions with ESA. The committee members have close connections with all of these projects. As with the ground-based situation, CSA funding is a major issue for the next decade.

There has been evolution of the committee members as follows. Chris Pritchett, the LRP chair, has rotated off, as set up in the LRPIC charter. The CSA observer, Luc Brule, has a new role in CSA and is replaced by Jean-Claude Piedboeuf. Tim Davidge has taken over as chair of the GAC and is a new observer member of LRPIC. The committee has been responsive, active, and sensible, and as chair, I commend them highly.

John Hutchings Nov 2011