

IAA SETI Committee meeting, IAC 2023 - notes from the chair.

The SETI Committee meeting was well attended with more than 20+ participants in-person and around the same number joining remotely via zoom. The SETI sessions were also well attended during the IAC with 30+ participants present at each session. We were greatly honoured to have Apollo 9 astronaut, Rusty Schweickart, attend session 1. There were also several Interactive Presentations made on the day after the main SETI sessions.

The PC meeting kicked off with tributes to members of the community that have recently passed away. In particular, we noted the passing of Muriel Hykes. Muriel was the partner of PC member and former co-chair Paul Shuch, and had accompanied and supported him at many previous meetings.

The chair's report to IAA commission 1 (Basic Sciences) was briefly presented. (See previous post to the mailing list).

Les Tennen (SETI Committee member and also a member of the IAA Board of Trustees) provided an update on the new IAA Committee Terms of Reference (ToR). It is expected that this will be approved at the spring meeting in Paris 2024. A draft is to be circulated to the various Committee Execs for comment. Changes to the ToR will note that the SETI Committee's main focus is on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence from observations of phenomenon located beyond the Earth's atmosphere. This also reflects an earlier decision made by the Committee when the UAP phenomena was discussed in Paris and sits well with the IAA's own mission. Les noted that an effort would be made to harmonise the various sources of online documentation of the various IAA committees - it will still be possible for us to maintain our own website that is pointed to via the official pages. Another change is that there will no longer be IAA Permanent Committees - so we will be known as the SETI Committee from this point onwards. This does not change the status or role of the SETI Committee. The ToR will also include rules about the appointment of new members. The SETI Committee would like to appoint new members before the next IAC in Milan using the new (draft) rules.

Kathryn Denning gave another very comprehensive review of Post-detection protocol activities around the world. This was further supplemented by a presentation from John Elliott on the work of the recently established SETI Post-detection hub at St. Andrews UK - see <https://seti.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>. A paper presenting the work of the IAA in this area (Oliver, Denning, Tennen & Garrett) had been presented at SETI session 2. The various presentations and recorded video, including one by Kate Genevieve that arrived too late to be presented in Session 2 are available here as a compressed file: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/dvxamf8v7mlhv7e/Archive.zip?dl=0>

Updates on SETI activities included reports from Breakthrough Listen (Pete Worden), the SETI Institute (Andrew Siemion on behalf of Bill Diamond), the UCLA SETI programme (Jean-Luc Margot) and the hugely successful "A Sign in Space" project (Daniella De Paulis). Breakthrough is beginning to look towards the establishment of a SETI capability on the Farside of the Moon and the Breakthrough Listen programme has secured funding for a further 6 years which is very good news indeed. The SETI Institute is looking to establish its own Post-Detection Working Group with some level of funding and to include both internal and external members. The Working Group will include elements beyond the purely scientific and technical protocols associated with a potential detection, and will include elements of the social sciences, policy and politics, journalism and media, the arts, and more. The Working Group will function as a precursor to a more fully formed research division within the Institute that may be established based on the identification of legitimate and sustainable sources of funding for ongoing work. In the meantime, the Institute will commit some level of funding for the Working Group to cover the cost of meetings and workshops and potentially stipends for some external members.

There are a number of very exciting meetings to be held in the coming year. In particular, the IAC 2024 will be held in Milan (14-18 October). Paulo Musso announced that there are discussions with INAF about organising meetings in the slip stream of the IAC - this will include SETI related events. Claude Maccone has submitted a proposal to hold a symposium on the Protection of the Lunar farside at IAC 2024. A symposium on the Lunar farside is also scheduled for 23-24 March 2024 in Paris, just before the IAF spring meeting (26-28 March). The IAC will be in Sydney (2025). Other meetings planned include: BL UK meeting (SKA HQ, Jodrell Bank, 13-15 Nov. 2023), Kavli-IAU Symposium (IAUS 387) "(Toward) Discovery Of Life Beyond Earth And Its Impact" (Durham, UK, 14-19 April 2024) and the XXXII IAU General Assembly (Cape Town, South Africa, 6-15 August 2024).

AOB: It was noted that there had been a flurry of activity on the IAA SETI Community email list, and that many people had been offended by some of the content - people had removed themselves from the list. The Executive noted that the email list is only partially moderated and a lot of trust is placed on the community in terms of how they use the list and what they post. The Exec has tried to be as open and transparent as possible, and was reluctant to censor posts or moderate all submissions. Nevertheless, the list is designed to be a vehicle for the committee to communicate its work to the wider SETI community. It also serves to announce basic news about SETI related meetings, events and other (e.g. job) opportunities. The list is not well suited to the discussion of complex matters such as harassment cases that involve other institutes/organisations. The SC Executive (Exec) also conveyed its unequivocal support for ECRs and the broader community in addressing these issues. The Exec is committed to the SC being a place where everyone feels comfortable and safe, especially ECRs who have recently joined the field. The Exec

welcomed suggestions on how to improve our activities, especially as they relate to equality, diversity, and inclusiveness, and encouraged active participation from those in attendance. This approach received support from other SC members present, including Les Tennen, who serves as legal counsel for the IAA Board of Trustees. Meeting participants welcomed the fact that this issue had been aired during the meeting. Since the IAA is a member of the IAF, and since the IAF organises the IAC, it was agreed that the IAA SETI Committee Community list will abide by the IAF Code of Conduct: https://iaf.nu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IAF-PL1-2009_Code-of-Conduct_Issue_2_Pub-1.pdf

Addendum:

- (i) Several SETI Committee members were elected to the IAA - Lori Walton and Kathryn Denning were elected as corresponding members and Andrew Siemion as a full member. Congratulations to all. If other Committee members were elected to the IAA, please let the Committee chair know.
- (ii) Elon Musk highlighted the importance of understanding whether there was intelligent life in the Universe towards the end of his discussion session at IAC 2023.
- (iii) The IAF has decided to hold IAC 2026 in Antalya, Turkey.
- (iv) The IAC 2023 special session on the Lunar Farside Protection was held on the final day of the IAC - it proved to be a very productive meeting with excellent presentations from the IISL and ITU.
- (v) Submissions to the IAA SETI Community email list are now moderated (as of 7 October). Moderation will be conducted by the SETI Committee Exec.
- (V) Lori Walton is conducting an exercise to identify committee member expertise via the membership list, on the suggestion of Kathryn Denning. This will permit us to better consider how we handle adding new members in 2024.

Mike Garrett, IAA SETI Committee chair.