

# **International Academy of Astronautics SETI Permanent Study Group**

## **Minutes from 2008 Annual Meeting Glasgow**

### **In attendance:**

Ivan Almar, Richard Clar, Bob DeBiase, Kathryn Denning, John Elliott, Ernst Fasan, Al Harrison, Claudio Maccone, Stelio Montebugnoli, Alexander Ollongren, Seth Shostak, Paul Shuch, Patricia Sterns, Les Tennen, Doug Vakoch, Lori Walton.

(Guest: Jeffrey Maclure joined about 45 minutes into the meeting.)

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Patricia Margaret Sterns <pms@astrolaw.com>  
Leslie Tennen <LTennen@astrolaw.com>  
Lori Walton <lawalton@telus.net>

Guest: Jeffrey Maclure <maclurejm@state.gov>

In the absence of the secretary, K. Denning was asked to take the minutes.

The Chair expressed his welcome, and the meeting was called to order.

### **1) Review and approval of meetings from Hyderabad meeting**

**MOTION:** Fasan moved to accept Hyderabad minutes. Sterns seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## **2) Appointment of Secretary**

Shuch moved for Carol Oliver to be appointed as SPSG Secretary. Maccone seconded. The motion passed unanimously, i.e. Carol Oliver hereby appointed Secretary.

## **3) Review of SETI sessions at Glasgow and in Paris, and upcoming meeting in Korea 2009**

### **A. Review of actual Glasgow meeting location/times etc.**

Some discrepancies in start time were resolved.

Expected Absences: Maryam couldn't get a visa, so Stelio will present. Musso can't attend.

The Pesek Lecturer this year is Jack Welch, and the BCEL Lecturer this year is Ivan Almar.

### **B. Feedback on Paris conference, and discussions of a future conference like it**

There was discussion on the subject of back-to-back conferences, like this year's Paris Searching for Life Signatures symposium and Glasgow IAC. Points raised: It can be beneficial for transatlantic travellers. However, two weeks is a long time to be out of the office, perhaps especially for those who teach. It was suggested that next time, the length could be shortened ... and perhaps the location could be the same for the IAC and the special SETI symposium? It was also suggested that if two back-to-back conferences are to be held, we should avoid duplication between the IAC and the special symposium.

At Shostak's invitation, Maccone talked about the intention to have another SETI conference in 2 years. (But n.b. Jean-Michel Contant makes the decisions, because he handles the funds, logistics etc.) In 2010, the IAC will be in Prague. So, where to have the SETI conference? Maccone suggested three candidate locations, Ukraine, Budapest, and Paris.

Ukraine is a candidate because of: Evpatoria; the low cost of accommodation, which would offset additional travel expense/time; there hasn't been a previous IAA in the former USSR because of the language issue; the conference could be run in Russian with translation for English speakers (apparently Contant has run two conferences like this with translators and it worked well).

On the other hand, Budapest is closer to Prague. Almar noted that this was a new idea, only mentioned yesterday, and so he would like to consult with colleagues there. There was a Bioastronomy conference held in Hungary 20 years ago, but there has not been a SETI conference yet. However, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences backed an IAA conference in 2005 on Space and Society. Almar also noted that the combination of SETI with astrobiology in the Paris conference was interesting, and there might be a similar possible liaison in Hungary, but n.b. SETI, astrobiology, and exoplanets etc. are not the same field and we should explicitly discuss whether or not they should be combined.

Maccone noted that the choice of Paris for this year was because of UNESCO – that this was the first time ever in the history of SETI that a conference had been held at UNESCO (a suggestion originally made to him by Jill Tarter). Contant had suggested several other worthwhile locations in Paris – e.g. Ecole Normale, free locations – but Maccone had insisted on UNESCO because he wanted to stress the social implications of SETI. It was a challenge to obtain a room at UNESCO for a manageable cost, however. If UNESCO is to be our preferred venue in the future, we need to let Contant know this preference.

Stelio then proposed another location: Bologna, because of the radiotelescope and appropriate venue. Would need time to figure out details, however.

Moscow was also mentioned.

Shostak asked Maccone to continue to work on location options. A brief poll of those in the room showed a wide variation of opinion: several were in favour of Moscow, several for Budapest, several for Italy, and several for Paris. Maccone agreed to continue to work on the subject.

Almar asked again whether this conference should be SETI alone, or a combination of SETI and another topic. Vakoch noted that the mixing of SETI and another subject is valuable, and suggested having SETI as a constant component, but the secondary subject rotating every two years. Shostak noted that if it was only SETI, we don't need a second conference at all. Harrison remarked that planetary defense could be a useful subject.

Denning noted that there didn't seem to be consensus that back-to-back timing was best, and that this should also be revisited. Stelio suggested the Thursday/Friday right before the IAC as a good time. Vakoch suggested that it be at the site of the IAC, i.e. Prague, since this would bring in extra people.

Shostak asked about the IAA handling of the Paris event. Elliott noted that the IAA had been simultaneously organizing the Glasgow conference, and so of course they could not give us their undivided support, and that this will always be a problem with consecutive events. Shuch remarked that support could have been better.

Maccone noted that the next Bioastronomy conference will be merged with ISSOL, July 3-8, 2011, in Montpellier. Alan Boss is chair of Commission 51 of IAU now, and in charge of this: it is another option.

It was agreed that there should be additional future discussion about the idea of holding two meetings in 2010, about the physical proximity of the meetings, desirability of two meetings, timing of the meetings, etc.

Shostak expressed thanks to Maccone, Denning, and Shuch for all their work on the Paris conference.

### **C. Pesek lecture nomination for Daejeon**

Shuch suggested Myung-Hyun Rhee.

### **D. Review of plans for Daejeon conference**

Review of Korea meeting: any objections to the proposed list? None.

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## **4) Publication of papers from past IACs**

Shostak noted that publication of SETI papers from past IACs is an ongoing problem – a festering wound that can kill the patient.

Shuch observed that the situation has changed markedly because *Acta Astronautica* has just changed their review process. Elliott added that he had been dealing with this for the last two months.

Shostak: All the papers back to 2003 are going to be posted on the IAA website, in the form in which you submitted them. Accessible only to IAA members for now, but eventually publicly available?

Vakoch – well it's some added value ...

Shostak: so perhaps this will be solved for us.

Elliott: The solution is round the corner ... A year ago, the mechanism for a standard issue of *Acta Astronautica* was tortuous and falling apart and presented something akin to

a black hole as you tried to go through the processes. The Elsevier representative agrees that it's been terrible: the last year or so it's been a major struggle and the special editions have been almost on hold ... e.g. months go by with no response just when seeking information. But it's all changed recently because Elsevier has taken the bull by the horns and brought them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a new process for submitting and reviewing work: streamlined, transparent, rigorous.

Elliott is currently going through a program and being trained to be an editor, and has been liaising here with the Elsevier representative, and will be fast-tracked soon to make sure everything is up to speed. He has been assigned a coeditor, Nikolai Smirnov, who is a member of Commission 1. Things will start moving faster now. They're going through rapporteurs' reports etc. – this is for papers going back ten years. Have to get the papers released ... Elliott is awaiting a response about that.

Shostak: So ... you now have a mechanism set up for going through rapporteurs' reports, selecting papers, asking authors for agreement, and if agreed, then they go into a special issue or multiple special issues.

Elliott: Yes, it really is happening now. I've gotten very active and things are really moving.

Sterns: But if you want broad publication and dissemination ... *Acta* is very expensive... many can't afford it. Another option especially for SETI II would be dual publication also by the Institute of Space Law.

Denning: I think *Acta* is one of the university site license journals, which could improve access.

Almar: Important to note on these papers which ones were revised and which weren't. *I.e.* specify "This has not been revised." If you start to modify ...

Elliott: Yes, we don't want revisions.

Shostak: Contant suggested a possibility of an IAA book ... which would work but if we can get these out in *Acta* that would be better: it's a refereed journal etc.

Elliott: Yes.

Sterns: We want the widest dissemination possible, but also affordable. Dual publication is an option ... The IAA proceedings are beautifully put together but they are also expensive. And I want hard copy, not electronic; lots of people do.

Shostak: We'd have to check into publication rights.

Vakoch: The policy used to be that you'd have to get permission from *Acta*.

Sterns: I've done it before ... took some time and persistence but did get permission for dual publication.

Harrison: I would be willing to run an email discussion on this, to find the best strategies.

Shostak: We owe John Elliott thanks. (Applause.)

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## **5) Subcommittee (Task Group) Reports**

### **A. Recent meeting regarding SETI Studies within the IAA:**

Meeting included J- M Contant, Shostak, Maccone, Vakoch, Shuch. Basically, we need IAA Studies. Shostak sent in two proposals, one for the publication project and the second for post-detection matters.

Vakoch: I see this as a reflection of restructuring within the IAA ... they want us to have three-year projects.

Elliott: I'm doing a paper on the post-detection strategy tomorrow. I'd like to be involved in this. I've mapped out a route forwards and it's doable in three years. I'm putting my name forward for this.

Harrison also offered to work on post-contact issues.

Shuch: The two scales (Rio and San Marino) that Almar created: these took three years to completion. Could they be defined retroactively as studies?

Shostak: Let's jump to the Post-Detection meeting and then come back to this.

### **B. Post-Detection Task Group.**

Shostak reviewed the PD meeting at Arizona in February 2008: The Protocols had been discussed some more, specifically the idea of creating something new. Shostak had reviewed the protocols and found some problems with the wording ... E.g. could confirm a detection only with other signatories, which wouldn't work in practice. Further, it was not clear about who would be notified first etc. Shostak considers its main purpose to be establishing SETI's intent to be transparent, not keep secrets etc. So at the Arizona meeting there was a decision to start trying to streamline the document into a new set of guidelines ...

**Discussion: Issue raised: The problem of invitees/attendees at that meeting:** Les Tennen stated that not all members of the Post-Detection Group had been informed of/invited to this Arizona meeting, and strongly objected to this, stating that it rendered suspect any product of that meeting. Patricia Sterns stated that she considered this omission to be an intellectual slight. Tennen further specified that Fasan and Almar had not been informed of the meeting either.

Several people who had attended the meeting (Shuch, Denning, Shostak) attempted to clarify: Paul Davies had organized the meeting, and it had two parts. The first (funded/special invitation) part was a symposium about the Fermi Paradox, and the second part was the PostDetection group meeting. It had surely not been Davies' intent to omit or slight anyone; it must have been an oversight based on an incomplete list. None of those present realized that others hadn't received invitations. Shostak assured all members that such an omission would not occur again, and asked: given that this issue of the incomplete list of invitees/attendees exists, should we now proceed at all right now with this discussion?

Tennen: Everybody should be able to review the work product of that group and comment upon it. This is probably not the right venue, but ...

Shuch: I'd like to hear your comments.

Tennen: For example, some of the language is vague and ambiguous ... e.g. last line about UN is completely impractical. We'll never get anywhere with the General Assembly or even with COPUOS.

I don't have a problem with revising it, as has been done several times over the last several years ... and if indeed [as mentioned earlier] these protocols arose out of competition between the US and the USSR that is in itself sufficient reason to revise it. But I don't know if this draft document advances the goals of streamlining and making it clearer. From a lawyer's perspective I find that there is a lot of ambiguity in this.

Sterns: These long paragraphs are not practical. It's not set up as an appropriate document for the UN.

Shostak: In discussion with Commission 1 last year, they wanted to know which international body. Others wanted it to stay vague though, lest the international bodies change over time.

Shostak: I don't think anyone is in disagreement that there should be further discussion. There was certainly no intention on our part to restrict this discussion; as far as I know, there was no intention or malevolence.

Tennen: I didn't intend to suggest that; but this does reflect on the process and the product of the SPSG.

Shostak suggested that the best course of action would be for him to open up the discussion via email. Shuch offered to help by posting documents.

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## **6) Discussion about representation, attendance, etc.**

Maccone and others: if we adjust the chairs/rapporteurs then we can have more people represented in Paris at the regular IAA meetings. (If people can't travel to Paris.)

Chairs for SETI I: Claudio and Stelio, Rapporteur: Shuch

Chairs for Session II in Korea: Elliott and Aoki, and Rapporteur John Traphagan.

Maccone observed that there was a need for funding for scholars. E.g. for the Paris 2008 symposium, the organizers approved multiple papers from Russian scientists who could not attend due to cost. Others received private sponsorship. The only funded lecture we currently have is the BCEL.

Shuch observed that it would be nice to make the Pesek lecture endowed. Shostak agreed and asked if anyone had concrete suggestions.

Almar noted that in his own country and some others, sometimes scientists can only apply for travel funds once they have had a paper accepted – and then, sometimes, the funds do not come through. Denning noted that this is a good reason to get acceptances out early. Shuch noted that in some places one can get travel funds only for invited lectures, but not for accepted presentations.

Discussion ensued about papers which are accepted, but whose authors cannot actually show up to present them. Tennen noted that the rule in the space law section is that if someone drops out, their paper can be summarized by someone else in 5 minutes. Almar noted that the IAF rules were different: no show, no paper. Shostak noted that despite this, summaries have been presented before. Sterns observed that what matters is that the paper really exists for dissemination.

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## **7) Other Business**

**SETI dinner tomorrow night:** Yen restaurant in front of the City Inn, 7 pm.



**Jeff McClure** said a few words about applying for membership. Stated that: he had been nominated for membership by Patricia Sterns in Bremen; he was a member of Commission 5 but felt that his participation had been curtailed since he was an American; was now a member of Commission 6 which was of greater interest to him anyway; is interested in SETI and hence would like to join the group, could assist in the administration etc.

Shostak asked McClure to send his cv for circulation. Shuch added that the group would then vote next year in Daejeon.

### **Continuation of activities within IAC?**

Shostak: Should we continue to be members of this organization?

No discussion

### **IAA SPSG Memberships**

Stelio noted that some people were nominated in Valencia and cvs were sent around, but nothing has happened.

### **Awards**

Shuch presented the Giordano Bruno memorial award from the SETI League to Ivan Almar.

### **Adjourned**