

## COMMISSION 6: ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS (TELEGRAMMES ASTRONOMIQUES)

**PRESIDENT: B.G. Marsden**

**VICE-PRESIDENT: K. Aksnes**

**ORGANIZING COMMITTEE: A.C. Gilmore, D.W.E. Green, S. Nakano,  
E. Roemer, R.M. West**

### **Report of Business Meeting at 14:00, 17 July 2003**

Members present: K. Aksnes, A. C. Gilmore, D. W. E. Green, B. G. Marsden, S. Nakano, D. J. Tholen, J. Tichá, G. V. Williams, H. Yamaoka

President Marsden welcomed the eleven other persons present and mentioned an e-mail concerning an agenda for the meeting, distributed to members prior to travel to Sydney. D. W. E. Green and G. V. Williams would serve as secretaries for the meeting.

Green, Director of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams (CBAT) since the Manchester General Assembly, gave a triennial report on the CBAT, noting it to be an update to the annual reports that appear in the IAU *Information Bulletin*.

Green prepared a majority of the *IAU Circulars (IAUCs)* during the previous triennium, with CBAT Director Emeritus B. G. Marsden preparing some, along with C.W. Hergenrother (who helped produce *Circulars* during the staff's absences from Cambridge in July–August, 2002). Green proposed that Minor Planet Center (MPC) Associate Director G.V. Williams, who has continued to serve as CBAT webmaster (and has been responsible for the Web CS dissemination of the *IAUCs*), be made Assistant Director of the CBAT, and this was approved unanimously.

Green noted the introduction in December 2002 of the new *Central Bureau Electronic Telegrams* (or *CBETs*), which are simple e-mail messages similar to the MPC's *Minor Planet Electronic Circulars (MPECs)*, issued in plain ASCII text only and thus much easier to produce than the formal  $\text{\TeX}$ -arranged *IAUCs*. The usefulness of the new *CBETs* is seen in several ways: (1) they permit (and encourage) other astronomers to aid in the issuing of discovery reports in the Director's absence; (2) they permit issuance of more-time-dependent reports without waiting to fill a full page of the printed *Circular*; and (3) the *CBETs* hold the potential to (in the future) contain much more information than can be put on a single printed *Circular*. Since their introduction, *CBETs* have been taken to be preliminary announcements of reports that are later issued formally via the *IAUCs*. But there is some expectation that, like the *MPECs*, the *CBETs* will acquire more permanence via posting on the CBAT website, and that (for example) long lists of very faint supernovae may soon be more practically issued on *CBETs*, with summaries given on *IAUCs*. In addition to Green, Marsden and K.E. Smalley have prepared some of the *CBETs*.

Green noted that there is much interest in continuing the printed *IAUCs* because of their long history, even though subscribers to the printed *IAUCs* are down from a pre-Internet count of more than 700 to a little more than 200 now; there currently are some 500 electronic subscribers to the *IAUCs*. Williams remarked that at some point in the next decade it might be realistic to consider ceasing to print the postcard-sized

*Circulars* and instead to issue printed books of *IAUCs* at intervals of perhaps 6 or 12 months (a suggestion already made several years ago by R.M. West).

D.J. Tholen asked how many *IAUCs* were now available in electronic form. Green responded that the project of preparing the old printed *Circulars* in computer form reached back nearly to *IAUC* 1700, due in large measure to the mainly volunteer effort of A.L.T. Green during the last three years. Marsden added that a supply of printed copies was still available back to about the same issue.

Green showed that some 6500 scientific e-mail messages had been sent to the CBAT in the last triennium, explaining that these included dozens of false-alarm reports, as well as queries from non-astronomers; some reports, of course, involve multiple e-mail messages regarding subsequent correspondence among those making reports, the CBAT, confirmers of reports and referees.

Green spoke about problem cases, particularly comet reports utilizing web images from the SOHO/SWAN wide-field ultraviolet camera and faint supernova candidates that are not spectroscopically confirmed (and some of which have no visible host galaxies). The faint-supernova-candidate issue was brought up with the new Working Group on Supernovae at Sydney, and the proposal is to establish a new webpage jointly by the WGS and the CBAT for quick announcement of unconfirmed supernova candidates, which will receive some kind of temporary designations there; permanent designations and announcement in the usual way (whether by *IAUC* or *CBET* or both) will occur upon confirmation, normally spectroscopically.

A new "Unconfirmed Observations" webpage (UOP) at the CBAT website was established some weeks prior to the Sydney meeting for posting promising but unconfirmed nova and supernova candidates, particularly in response to a request by H. Yamaoka, who pointed out that quick follow-up is desired for nova and supernova reports; A.C. Gilmore also emphasized this point. The trial version of the UOP was announced (prior to Sydney) to the two dozen or so supernova experts on the CBAT e-mail list (who for years had been sent private e-mails concerning such unconfirmed supernova candidates) and to some nova confirmers in regular contact with the Central Bureau. There was no motion at the meeting to make the URL of this webpage publicly available, and the consensus seemed to be to keep the trial period going for some additional time.

Green observed that new comet-naming guidelines (drafted by himself, Marsden and Williams) had been approved by the Division III Committee on Small Body Nomenclature a few months earlier and are now available at the CBAT and CSBN websites. There was some discussion at this Commission 6 meeting about unnamed comets.

Tholen asked if the CBAT still received any IAU support, and Marsden replied that IAU support had been 8000 CHF per triennium, although none of the promised 12 000 CHF had been received this past triennium. Green added that line charges are still very necessary to pay expenses, including CBAT staff salaries.

Marsden then conducted discussion on Commission 6 matters, first asking the membership to stand in memory of deceased member A.S. Sharov. K. Aksnes (Norway) was accepted as the new commission President and Gilmore (New Zealand) as the new Vice President. The Organizing Committee is rounded out with Green (as CBAT Director), Marsden (as past President), S. Nakano (Japan), E. Roemer (U.S.), N. Samus (Russia) and J. Tichá (Czech Republic), a group that is at least moderately compatible with what might be termed the "three ge's"—namely, "geography, gender and generation". G. Apostolovska and G.R. Kastel' were transferred from consultancy to membership status. D. Coletti and B. Corbin were admitted as members, S. Isobe was re-admitted, and M. Tichý was welcomed as a consultant. Marsden noted that Commission 6 is being transferred from a "committee of the IAU Executive Committee" to one of six rather unrelated commissions in the newly created Division XII (Union-wide Activities). It

was not expected that this change would significantly affect the character of Commission 6, although the Executive Committee has made it clear that commissions will have to “justify themselves” in the future. Aksnes would represent the commission on the Division XII Organizing Committee.

B. G. Marsden  
*President*