

## Preface

IAU Symposium 213 was entitled “Bioastronomy 2002: Life Among the Stars”. This title was chosen to reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the conference, which ranged from astronomy to biology, with strong elements of earth and planetary sciences. The only thing held in common by all participants was a passion to try to understand how life started on Earth, whether life may have evolved elsewhere in the Universe, and how we might go about finding it.

The conference was held in the spectacular tropical setting of Hamilton Island, on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, offering participants a relaxing and creative environment which is essential for a successful cross-disciplinary conference. The conference attracted over 200 participants, many with partners and family, and some 233 papers were presented, most of which are included in these proceedings.

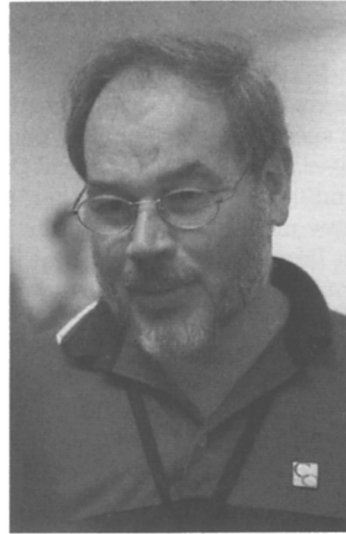
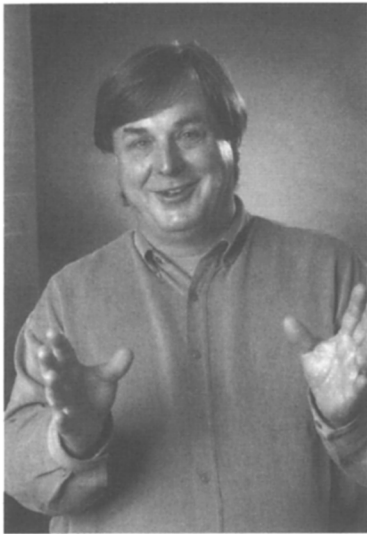
The conference was unusual in that it was held in tandem with the 2002 Fulbright Symposium “Science Education in Partnership”. This alignment reflects the fact that Bioastronomy is a powerful and compelling path to expose young people to science. Aligning the two conferences in this way offered an opportunity for educators to interact with some of the leading scientists in this field, and for the scientists to see how their research was being used to promote science education. One afternoon was shared between the two Symposia, resulting in a special education section in these proceedings. We thank the Australian-American Fulbright Commission for making all this possible.

The primary goal of the conference was to stimulate cross-fertilisation between all the disciplines that come to meet in this field of bioastronomy. We asked speakers to target their talks at scientists from other disciplines, and Chris Tinney introduced a “yellow card” system by which participants could remind speakers if they were using jargon. Barriers were also broken down by ample time for informal discussion, by beach walks and evening debates, and by some exotic cocktails which looked as if they might be in danger of creating some new life forms themselves. The meeting was undoubtedly a great success, and it owes this success to a great many people. First and foremost amongst these was Carol Oliver, who chaired the Local Organising Committee, made things happen, pulled a million loose ends together, and fixed things when the strings occasionally became unravelled. Ray “Moon Buggy” Johnston, a local astronomer from Hamilton Island, was instrumental in putting on a splendid welcome from the local community for the Symposium participants. He and his colleagues helped in countless ways to make the whole Symposium run smoothly, and much of the success of the symposium is due to Ray and his friends. A special thankyou must be made to Monty Prior and his family from the Birrigubba people, who represented the traditional aboriginal owners of the land, and who welcomed us so warmly as guests to their land.

I must also thank the magnificent and tireless support given to the symposium by the other members of the Local Organising Committee: Edna DeVore, Marsha Cadman, Kerrie Dougherty, Rosalind Grymes, Karen Meech, Helen Sim, Frank Stootman, Les Vozzo, Malcolm Walter, and Kristina Wilmoth. Just as important were the members of the Scientific Organising Committee (Baruch Blumberg, Stu Bowyer, Rosalind Grymes, Jack Farmer, Guillermo Lemarchand,

Horst Keller, Geoff Marcy, Lori Marino, Mikhail Marov, Michel Mayor, Carol Oliver, Lucia Padrielli, Frank Stootman, Jill Tarter, and Chris Tinney), who helped put together an excellent program, choose the speakers, referee the papers, chair the sessions, and help in so many other ways. The invited speakers themselves set the tone for all the ensuing discussion, and I would especially like to thank Baruch Blumberg, Paul Davies, and Harrison Schmidt for setting the scene and for their public talks and many interactions with the media, and Allen Tough for organising a stimulating panel discussion in which we challenged some of the preconceptions embedded in this discipline. I would also like to thank those participants who contributed the many excellent photographs that liven up these proceedings, especially Seth Shostak who was the “official photographer” for the symposium. And of course the symposium would never have happened if it had not been for our generous sponsors: Australian Centre for Astrobiology, SETI Institute, NASA Astrobiology Institute, International Astronomical Union, CSIRO Australia Telescope National Facility, Anglo-Australian Observatory, University of Western Sydney, Fantasea, Hamilton Island, and Heli-Aust Tourism. Finally, I would like to thank the participants themselves - for the excellent talks and posters, for the penetrating questions, for the stimulating discussions, and for bringing to the Symposium an open mind, enthusiastic curiosity, and a readiness to exchange ideas with those from other disciplines.

Ray Norris (chair, Scientific Organising Committee)



The editors, Ray Norris and Frank Stootman (*photo: Seth Shostak*)