

ESO AT THE IAU GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE 25TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE International Astronomical Union was held in Sydney, Australia, from 13-24 July 2003. For two weeks the world of professional astronomy descended on Darling Harbour. In the early days it was used for receiving fresh produce and timber from Parramatta and the north coast, but with time had become a somewhat derelict dock area. Following massive redevelopment of the old wharves in the course of

the 1980s, it now constitutes a spectacular example of contemporary urban renovation, with shopping malls, hotels, restaurants, museums and other leisure facilities, as well as the magnificent Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre (SCEC).

With more than 2000 participants, six symposia, three invited discourses, 21 joint discussions, four special sessions and numerous working group, division and commission meetings, participating IAU members seemed to agree that the meeting was highly successful. But also the public was well looked after, with a large public astronomy exhibition with an 'industry day' and a 'school day' as well as numerous public lectures and activities organised by Sydney's community of amateur astronomers as part of the Australian Festival of Astronomy, in itself a month-long activity.

The exhibition was organised in Hall 5 of the SCEC. As at the previous IAU General Assemblies, ESO was represented with an information stand. Not surprisingly, the main features were the ALMA and OWL projects, but other ESO activities were shown as well. A model of the OWL telescope drew the attention of many visitors, with comments revealing almost all aspects of human reactions, from awe to excitement and enthusiasm. The enthusiasm was not confined to the professional audience. Thus the

weekend edition of the *Australian*, one of the main broadsheet newspapers, featured a full-page article about OWL and ELTs. The ESO stand also served as backdrop for several TV interviews and, as has become tradition, also functioned as meeting point both for ESO astronomers and for many visitors.

On separate stands, projects with ESO participation were shown: the ALMA project, the stand of which was situated vis-à-vis the ESO stand, and the Astrophysical Virtual Observatory. ESO staff took turns at all three stands, talking to astronomers, amateurs and to media representatives.

Through the many talks given by ESO astronomers, articles in the *Magellanic Times* (the conference newspaper), press releases and the information stands, ESO maintained a high visibility, as justified by the exciting programmes and activities that keep this organisation busy during these years.

CLAUS MADSEN



Esteban Illanes from ESO Chile explaining the ALMA project during the school day.

ESO Director General appointed President-Elect of the International Astronomical Union



Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, the new President-Elect of the IAU, and Prof. Ron Ekers, the new President, in front of the ESO stand at the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union in Sydney.

The General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), meeting in Sydney (Australia) in July, has appointed the ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, as President-Elect for the three-year period 2003-2006. The IAU is the world's foremost organisation for astronomy, uniting almost 9000 professional scientists on all continents.

The IAU General Assembly also elected Prof. Ron Ekers (Australia) as President (2003 - 2006). Dr. Cesarsky will become President of the IAU in 2006, when the General Assembly next meets in Prague (The Czech Republic). Dr. Cesarsky is the first woman scientist to receive this high distinction.

"The election of Catherine Cesarsky as President-Elect of the IAU is an important recognition for a scientist who has made impressive contributions to various areas of modern astrophysics, from cosmic rays to the interstellar medium and cosmology", commented the outgoing IAU President, Prof. Franco Pacini. "It is also an honour and an important accolade for the European astronomical community in general and ESO in particular."

(see ESO Press Release 21/03 for more information)