

ESO, the European Southern Observatory, was created in 1962 to "... establish and operate an astronomical observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy..." It is supported by eleven countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. ESO operates at three sites in the Atacama desert region of Chile. The Very Large Telescope (VLT), is located on Paranal, a 2 600 m high mountain approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta. The VLT consists of four 8.2 m diameter telescopes. These telescopes can be used separately, or in combination as a giant interferometer (VLTI). At La Silla, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile at 2 400 m altitude, ESO operates several optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m. The third site is the 5 000 m high Llano de Chajnantor, near San Pedro de Atacama. Here a new submillimetre telescope (APEX) is being completed, and a large submillimetre-wave array of 64 antennas (ALMA) is under development. Over 1600 proposals are made each year for the use of the ESO telescopes. The ESO headquarters are located in Garching, near Munich, Germany. This is the scientific, technical and administrative centre of ESO where technical development programmes are carried out to provide the Paranal and La Silla observatories with the most advanced instruments. ESO employs about 320 international staff members, Fellows and Associates in Europe and Chile, and about 160 local staff members in Chile.

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### Front Cover Picture: *Galaxy NGC 1097*

This is an almost-true colour composite based on three images made with the multi-mode VIMOS instrument on the 8.2 m Melipal Unit Telescope of the VLT. The observations were made on the night of December 9–10, 2004, in the presence of the President of the Republic of Chile, Ricardo Lagos. The exposures were taken and pre-processed by ESO Paranal Science Operation astronomers, with additional image processing by Hans Hermann Heyer (ESO). More details are available in ESO Press Release 28/04.