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12 September 2005

Stephanie Mikac  
Inquiry Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
House of Representatives

Ref: Supplementary UK-Australian Agreement regarding the Anglo-Australian Telescope

Dear Ms Mikac,

Thank you for your email correspondence of 7 September 2005 asking for comment on the Supplementary Agreement between the UK and Australia in connection with the Anglo-Australian Telescope (AAT) at Siding Spring Observatory (SSO). The ACT Government contacted me in late August indicating that the JSCoT was reviewing a Supplementary Agreement with the UK regarding the AAT. Although as a member of the Australian astronomical community I have been aware of the existence and basic intent of the agreement, to my knowledge this is the first time that the ANU has been approached to make a submission, which we are pleased to do herewith.

The Australian National University (ANU) owns SSO, where the Anglo-Australian Telescope (AAT) is sited. ANU's Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics (RSAA), which manages the site on behalf of ANU, has enjoyed a long collaboration with the Anglo-Australian Observatory (AAO) on scientific, technical, and Siding Spring site issues. As the largest astronomical research group in the country, RSAA is the chief Australian user of the AAT, and is impressed with the level of user service that the AAO provides, and its innovation in renewing the telescope to best scientific advantage. As the two premier optical astronomical instrumentation groups in Australia, the RSAA and the AAO have frequent occasions to collaborate technically. Finally, as the "landlords" for the SSO site, RSAA has amicable and fruitful relations with AAT staff. Indeed, given that our own ANU telescopes are now solely sited at SSO, we face and address many of our common challenges together.

It is with this background that I thoroughly endorse the thrust of the Supplementary Agreement for the AAT, and urge its immediate implementation. It is of vital importance to the Australian astronomical community that the AAO begin this transition step toward a fully-Australian entity.

I would like to express my concern, however, that the declining budget for the AAO in the period 2006-2010 could have deleterious implications for the ability of this model national facility to maintain its excellent service to its user base, while exploring new opportunities for optical-infrared astronomy for the Australian community. A separate review of this matter would be timely.

Sincerely,

Penny D. Sackett

Cc: Prof. Lawrence Cram, Deputy Vice Chancellor-Research, ANU

Dr. Matthew Colless, Director, Anglo-Australian Observatory