

The following statement was given by CASCA President, Sara Ellison, before the official welcome of the 2021 AGM:

Welcome everyone.

My name is Sara Ellison, President of CASCA.

It's great to see so many people here today – even if it's on zoom.

Let me say thank you to everyone who put in such long hours organizing this AGM.

It takes an enormous amount of work.

And I know we all greatly appreciate everyone's efforts.

In a moment Dennis will open the meeting with an official welcome.

But as CASCA President I wanted to start by addressing an important issue that has caused a lot of concern among our members.

As many of you will know, in preparing for this conference there was a genuine misunderstanding between the Board and the OOC regarding the planning of the session on Indigenous cultural awareness. This misunderstanding has had very serious consequences.

What is abundantly clear to me -- and to everyone in the CASCA leadership – is that in planning this conference we failed to meet the expectations you had for discussing critical issues regarding Indigenous rights.

And for that, we are profoundly sorry.

I want to apologize again to Hilding Neilson and to the committees involved in the organization of this meeting.

I also want to apologize to you – the CASCA membership -- for our failure to meet your needs at this AGM.

Clearly, we need to do better.

And we will.

To that end, let me outline initial steps we are taking:

First, the CASCA Board has reaffirmed its commitment to fully implement the recommendations regarding Indigenous rights in our Long-Range Plan.

We agree that implementing these recommendations is critically important work to the future of astronomy in Canada.

And that work involves all of us.

For that reason, the Board requested the session on Indigenous cultural awareness that is taking place later today and has made efforts to incorporate discussion about Indigenous rights throughout the meeting program.

In particular, the LRP session on Friday invites community discussion on the process of consultation and implementation of the LRP's recommendations.

Second, following the AGM, the CASCA Board will meet the Equity and Inclusivity Committee and the LRP Community Recommendations Implementation Committee to build a robust consultation and implementation plan for the LRP recommendations.

You have made it clear that as part of that plan you want more opportunities to participate in an open discussion about Indigenous rights.

And I can promise you that we will work as hard as we can to meet that expectation.

At the end of the day, I know that we share the same aspiration, even if sometimes we fall short -- as the CASCA leadership has here.

We are all scientists. And we are passionate about scientific discovery.

But we are also members of the larger community.

At our best, the work we do and the discoveries we seek should never come at the expense of human rights and the struggle for social justice.

On behalf of the CASCA Board, I ask you to accept my apology and to measure us by the actions we take going forward.

Thank you for listening.

The summary below was given to members attending a follow-up session on Monday May 10:

- Early on in the planning of this AGM the Board identified an education session on Indigenous cultural awareness as a high priority for the community. This would be a first for CASCA, driven by our commitment to this topic and the Indigenous-focused LRP recommendations.
- The EIC was consulted over the Board's desire to plan this cultural awareness session. The EIC supported/approved the Board's suggestion and agreed that the Board would take leadership on this session, whilst the EIC took ownership for the separate EDI session. Having established that division of responsibility, the Board proceeded with its planning with the OOC.
- Dennis Crabtree (Chair of the OOC) was asked to organize the Indigenous cultural awareness session in consultation with the Board. The OOC agreed with the Board that this would be an excellent resource for us to offer the community. Dennis organized for Bob Joseph to speak, as well as distribute his book free of charge.
- The Board's vision and proposed scope for Bob Joseph's talk was to be in the format of a talk and discussion specifically on the topic of Bob's presentation. Since Bob indicated that he does not do panel discussions, the format was set to be a Q&A. The session was deliberately planned for the first day, both to give it a high billing, and to orient the community for the discussions that would come later in the week (such as at the TMT and LRP sessions).
- Our motivations for this scope and format were several-fold:
 - We wanted to make the most of our time with Bob Joseph (as an external invited speaker) and use this as an education/training session for our community.
 - Depending on the session content, reactions to Indigenous awareness/education can vary from inspired to distressed. Indeed, experts delivering Indigenous awareness training recommend taking some personal time to reflect and recover and we aimed to provide the same opportunity to our community
 - Finally, there was the practical consideration that we were trying to build-up to the big discussions later in the week, by starting with this awareness session, then moving on to the very specific topic of TMT and finally with the broad-reaching LRP discussion on Friday.

- About a month ago, through Samar (in her role as CASCA VP and liaison with the OOC), we became aware that Dennis was planning a panel discussion immediately after Bob's presentation to discuss LRP priorities. We had concerns about this for reasons I have just outlined. We met with Dennis to clarify our originally proposed scope and its motivations. However, by that time, Dennis had already reached out to Hilding asking him to prepare some terms of reference. We asked Dennis to get back to Hilding in order clarify our originally proposed scope for a broad cultural awareness/education session. Dennis agreed, so that we would revert back to the original plan of a session dedicated to interactions with Bob and a Q/A session. In recognition of the work that Hilding had done, we also invited him to be involved in moderating the session. We asked Dennis to communicate all of this to Hilding.
- Despite our intention to be transparent to Hilding about all of these points, Dennis erroneously communicated the motivation as pressure on the schedule. This was a genuine misunderstanding between Dennis, Samar and myself.
- In order to rectify the mis-communications, I reached out to Hilding directly offering to meet with him, but he requested to communicate by email. I therefore provided a written account detailing in full the explanation of the events, along with an apology, as we fully understood his position and sincerely regretted the outcome.
- Dennis also recently sent Hilding a personal apology explaining the errors on his side.

In summary, there was a genuine misunderstanding between the Board and the OOC on the planning of the Indigenous awareness session that only came to light about a month ago. The organization of this AGM has required the navigation of logistical challenges that are completely new to CASCA meeting planning. In addition to the virtual format, we have expanded the scope far beyond our usual science staples. This has entailed organization by numerous parallel committees and working groups. Since future CASCAs will continue to embrace these wide-reaching societal aspects, we need to learn from our experiences this year. We are already working to improve the AGM planning guide to facilitate next year's organization, and we welcome input on that process.