

ACURA Advisory Committee for the Square Kilometer Array report 2022 (May)

Members: Don Brooks (ACURA), Bryan Gaensler (Toronto), Séverin Gaudet (NRC), Julie Hlavacek-Larrondo (Montréal), Doug Johnstone (NRC), Gregory Sivakoff (Alberta), Kristine Spekkens (Queen's), Dave Stevens (MDA), Ingrid Stairs (UBC), and Gilles Joncas (chair, Laval). Observers: Will Percival (GAC), Michael Rupen (NRC), Luc Simard (NRC), Rob Thacker (CASCA), Kim Venn (ACURA), and Chris Wilson (LCRIC)

The AACS has not met since the last report to the ACURA Board (February 2022). However, a meeting will be scheduled during the week of June 13th.

Nevertheless, actions continue to take place so Canada becomes a full member of the SKA Observatory (SKAO).

- Project updates were provided to the Canadian astronomical community in the December and March issues of CASCA's e-Casseopeia newsletter.
- The Coalition for Canadian Astronomy has had half a dozen meetings with Government officials since the last report to raise awareness of SKA-related decisions and timelines.
- Our SKA four-page document, aimed at decision-makers, describing the project and its benefits for Canada has been updated.
- The support letter package from Canadian universities was also updated. Most universities with astronomy research groups have now provided statements.
- Work within the signed Cooperative Agreement between Canada (National Research Council) and the SKA Observatory is moving apace.
- An ACURA-funded software developer has been hired to work on the SKA Canada website (skatelescope.ca). Initial goals are to transition the site to a secure protocol (ie. https instead of http), update Wordpress packages, homogenize the English and French versions of the site, and add a page on SKA Regional Centers.
- Domain names for the SKA Observatory website to which skatelescope.ca will transition to follow the new SKAO branding guidelines have been purchased by ACURA.
- Kristine Spekkens, Canadian Science Director for the SKA, continues to represent Canada on the SKAO Science and Engineering Advisory Committee (SEAC) and recently became a member of a SEAC tiger team that will work with the project office to develop telescope time allocation models for consideration by the SKAO Council.
- Kristine Spekkens, Greg Sivakoff and the AACS Chair meet basically every week with NRC (Luc Simard and Michael Rupen) to exchange information.
- Séverin Gaudet and other Canadian data science experts continue to work with the SKA partners on defining the SKA Regional Centers (SRCs) through SRC Steering Committee (SRCSC) activities.

The SKA project was not mentioned per se in the last Federal Budget. This was expected given recent world events, because the revealing of the Federal budget is increasingly becoming a political statement, and because the federal government is increasingly using its Economic Updates to announce new projects. (Approval/funding directives of both TMT and the recent Cooperative Agreement with SKA occurred during such updates). The Government remains interested in the SKA project, is very aware of our timeline, and continues to ask cogent questions to both the Coalition and NRC. Canadian astronomy must be sensitive to the fact that SKA is a treaty organization, an entity that is not currently used in Canada for scientific projects. The AACS evaluation is that the outlook for Canadian participation remains positive. The AACS is looking forward to the June and Autumn Economic Updates from the federal government.

Gilles Joncas
Chair
AACS