

## Minutes: ASSA Council 2 February 2010

(Held in the SALT Boardroom, SAAO, 2000-2300h)

1. Welcome by Michael Poll, President, ASSA
2. Present: De Villiers, Glass, Govender, Hettlage, Hoffmann, Martinez, Poll, Rogers, Saunders, Soltynski, Turk. Lerika Cross listening via Skype.
3. Apologies: Booth, De Coning, Labuschagne, Rijdsdijk
4. Accepted Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 2009 minutes with amendments as specified on Agenda.

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Before next item on Agenda, Martinez (Acting director, SAAO) spoke on Prof Charles's suspension pending a disciplinary hearing. Reason concerned distribution of "sensitive" documents. SAAO executive met with NRF Thursday to improve communications with Head Office. We (SAAO) are supporting Phil – not all facts are available – appealed to people to be calm, watch the situation and particularly to avoid statements to the media. Seemed to be in favour of ASSA taking no action.

Soltynski suggested that this being in the "corporate world" we would probably hear nothing of the outcome of the hearing.

Following a short discussion of what action to take, the following resolution, to be conveyed to Prof Charles and the NRF CEO, was taken:

"The Council of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa wishes to express its support for Prof Phil Charles in his direction of the SAAO and also to express its concern at the manner in which the manner of his suspension has been handled by the National Research Foundation. A speedy resolution of this matter is suggested, in the interests of SA astronomy."

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### 5. Matters Arising:

5.1.1. and 5.1.2 MNASSA software items to be removed from Agenda.

5.2 Deepsky software. Auke to be told this is off the Agenda until he provides the information requested.

5.3 Editorial Board: Implement as requested.

5.4 Starter Pack – new memo just received added to the minutes at end.

5.5 Alternates: Turk would try to encourage Cape Centre members to take more interest in national ASSA in an upcoming meeting. De Coning is alternate for Hoffmann. No alternate yet for Poll.

5.6 S & T (hon members) Martinez stated that this has mostly been sorted out. Cramb and Turk had received missing back issues. Slotegraaf is missing issues from 2009. S & T seemed to have the correct details. Martinez will contact them about a problem that the various subscriptions start on different dates making it hard for us to keep track of them.

## 6 Vacant positions on Council

### 6.1 No progress

6.2 Soltynski gave the history of the interaction with Isobel Bassett as he saw it. She initially expressed interest but did not want to discuss fees etc till she saw what the job entailed. Turk had proved obstructive to the point that by 14 December she stated she did not want to carry on. The idea had been that something like R20000 would be paid for as an honorarium for the year's work of Business Manager. It was felt that on the basis of the time she had already put in up to a certain point that R6000 was a reasonable honorarium to give her.

Turk explained his point of view about the various problems and denied being obstructive.

Bassett had put in claims for R1862.75 for MNASSA-related expenses and R6416.96 for Handbook-related expenses (these were postage, and sundry items).

Following a long discussion, it was resolved to settle the matter by paying Bassett the R1862.75, the R6416.96 and an honorarium of R8000, since she had done further work in spite of everything. Also, she was to be paid for further expenses when she had submitted the necessary receipts etc. She had already received R6000 of the total as "floats".

Cliff agreed that this could be done as soon as he received a signed copy of these minutes. Poll to contact Isobel. ISG to contact her informally.

7. Agreed that it is necessary to formulate job descriptions, responsibilities etc, perhaps as a document that was less formal than the Constitution, partly to prevent similar problems arising again.

8 Business matters. We will try to clear these matters up and need some feedback from Bassett.

9. ASSA Symposium in Pretoria. To be asked to send information to Koorts for MNASSA, which should go to press in a few days from now.

## 10. Financial Report

Turk reported that we have R136K in Plusplan, R121K in Marketlink, R82K in Marketlink for Scholarship fund (of which 12 K available for distribution).

Of 4 years of outstanding accounts, one is complete and audited, one is nearly ready and two are still in progress. Treasurer apologized that he had been slowed up due to health problems. The accounts would eventually be published in MNASSA.

Rijsdijk had requested information about MNASSA costs.

Turk gave 2007 figures of R38008 for printing, R1159 for Forex, R21415 for postage; Total R60583. Revenue from sales was R18430.

For 2006, the figures were R29116, R2273, R18389, R49778, R13777 respectively.

11 New Members

Maureen Rogers read the list of new members. To be forwarded for publication in MNASSA. She also mentioned the death of a member, Kevin Mead.

12 The agreement with Wayne Trow to edit Sky Guide was signed with the minor modification that one payment should be made in early July instead of end June to help with a bookkeeping issue.

In view of late delivery by the printers and consequent other problems it was felt that the schedule for Sky Guide should be re-worked.

13 Poll has circulated proposed amendments to the Constitution and requests that Council members read these and make any suggestions before the end of February.

14 Letter from Chris Stewart: Council does not feel that Oleg issue requires expulsion and that he seems to have rectified his “transgression”. Some problems seem to exist about old www addresses and the content that Google searches come up with. Hettlage to draft a reply for Poll to send.

15 S & T Club membership: Documents have been circulated to relevant people.

16 Scholarships: Soltynski reported:

2009: There were two scholarship holders in 2009, both of the SAAO-ASSA Scholarship. Rocco Coppjans obtained his BSc from Pretoria, passing all his 9 courses, 8 with distinctions. He has started his B.Sc(Hons) studies in astronomy with NASSP at UCT. Tshepo Molane (1<sup>st</sup> year BSc at UCT) passed 3 of his 6 courses

2010: While a number of enquiries were received during the year, disappointly only two applications materialised. The Scholarships Committee (Soltynski, Govender, Gray,

Glass) awarded only one, the SAAO-ASSA Scholarship, to Riyaadh Jamodien, who will study for his BSc in physics at Stellenbosch.

Since there are still some scholarships available it was felt that further (late) applications could be looked at.

## 17 Any Other Business

17.1 Nobody sure what is happening about roof of ASSA room.

17.2 Constant Volschenk (JHB) was told that we do not control auditing of Centres, which can make their own rules, subject to Council approval.

17.3 Hoffmann reported on progress for ASSA Bloemfontein fund-raising and projects. Asked for letter of support from ASSA. He should draft a letter for Poll to send. Also described various outreach efforts on the radio, including programme with W Koorts. More problematical to get onto the English radio.

17.4 (Kevin) Govender reported that April will probably be declared an “Astronomy Month” as legacy of the 2009 Year of Astronomy.

17.5 Turk reported on unsatisfactory state of Council minute archiving. Old minute book was full and last couple of years, being on loose papers, may get lost. He will attempt to collect together a definitive set of minutes and put them in a proper book.

17.6 Carole Botha has apparently located her certificate, so this is no longer an issue.

18. Next meeting fixed for Tues. 4 May.

Minutes taken by I.S. Glass

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## **Progress report for the Astronomy Starter CD** **As at 01 February 2010**

### **1 Background**

The ASSA Durban Committee on adopting this project determined the following:

1. That the project had the potential to become the amateur astronomer’s first choice in material to begin to explore the skies
2. That a reasonable profit could be made to make the project worth the required effort.
3. That all the component parts would be professionally manufactured, assembled and packaged with minimum input from ASSA members apart from postage.

4. That the material in its present form did not project the right image of ASSA and that improvements would have to be made.

## **2 Improvements**

1. The planisphere would have to be made out of more durable material
2. The packaging to be changed to bubble or blister packs on a card suitable for merchandising purposes at retail outlets.
3. The packaging to be designed to fit into the smallest possible outer container
4. The improvements to conform to Post Office standards to ensure the cheapest possible postage rates nationally as well as to other southern hemisphere countries.

## **3 Progress**

1. Unforeseen delays as a result of the Christmas period by manufacturers and packagers have caused the project to be delayed.
2. The Planisphere has been redesigned and manufactured out of plastic
3. Final prototype is presently with packaging experts who will quote by the end of next week
4. Peter Cramb is expected to take the Starter Pack in its final packaging to Cape Town during the week ending 20 February 2010 for presentation to ASSA Committee members with the finalised price per unit excluding postage.
5. On approval of which production will commence the following week and the product ready for distribution by the end of March 2010.

## **4 Unforeseen Bonus**

During production of sample of the new planisphere a larger model than was ordered was inadvertently produced. This product which compares very favourably with the Philips Planisphere can be sold on its own. It is envisaged that it would be sold at a price slightly less than the Philips but would be readily available at all times and would reflect ASSA's logo. It is rather brighter than the Philips and is believed by the committee to be more saleable.

We are pleased to advise that we now have two products for sale where only one was previously envisaged.

## **5 Funding**

The project has taken on dimensions that were not foreseen. Setting up costs for die cutting and tooling in the amount of approximately R17000.00 would have to be sought to get the project off the ground. ASSA Durban has agreed to make available R6000.00 of its own funds and we respectfully hope to avail ourselves of the previously offered "seed money" from ASSA on a loan basis to be paid back from sales

over period no longer than twelve months. Should sales however match our projections, this amount would be paid back within three months.

## **6 Profits**

The ASSA Durban committee proposes the profits accruing to ASSA are banked separately and to be earmarked for travel expenses for the incumbent chairman to visit all ASSA branches during his/her year of office.

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