SARAO Users Committee
Terms of Reference
29 November 2017

1. Introduction

With the coming operational status of the MeerKAT radio telescope and the formation of the integrated South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO), SARAO will be catering to the needs of an expanding user community. In order to do so successfully, it wishes to draw on the expertise of its user community through the formation of a Users Committee.

Since 2014 SKA SA benefited from the SKA South Africa Science Committee, which represented the scientific interests of the relevant South African research community, while being advisory to the SKA SA Managing Director on matters related to planning for SKA that impact science, and providing a link between the broader research community and SKA SA.

The newly established SARAO Users Committee provides continuity with the previous advisory structure while addressing new challenges inherent in the coming expanded Observatory era for SARAO.

2. Mandate

The SARAO Users Committee is established in order to advise the SARAO Managing Director (MD) and staff on all aspects of SARAO activities that affect the users and potential users of its facilities.

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The committee also represents the scientific interests of the South African research community in aiming to: advance South African research leadership in the international Square Kilometre Array project; maximize the scientific return to South Africa of participation in the SKA; and maximize the scientific return to South Africa on the investment in MeerKAT as an SKA precursor, and other radio guest instruments that may be hosted in South Africa.

In order to perform its function, the committee must remain up to date with relevant technical and scientific developments at SARAO, and may of its own accord request such updates from SARAO or provide recommendations to the SARAO MD.

The SARAO MD may also ask the committee for advice regarding any scientific or technical activity at SARAO.

3. Membership

1. There shall be at least five non-SARAO members of the committee. The SARAO Chief Scientist and Chief Technologist are ex-officio members of the committee.
2. All members, including the Chair, shall be appointed by the SARAO MD.
3. Members shall be selected primarily based on scientific expertise and experience, aiming to have a broad representation of the relevant science areas and user communities.
4. Notwithstanding 3.3, due consideration shall be given to cultural and gender diversity and to institutional and regional distribution. However, members are appointed in their personal capacity and do not represent specific institutions or regions.

5. The standard appointment is for a two-year term.

6. Members may be reappointed to subsequent terms.

7. Members of the committee serve without remuneration, but shall receive reimbursement of necessary travel expenses.

4. Governance and Operations

1. The committee will meet at least twice yearly.

2. The committee will establish its internal procedures (e.g., deciding on what constitutes a quorum for particular discussions).

3. Committee members will canvas their particular science communities prior to meetings to determine items of interest to the SARAO user community.

4. At least once yearly, SARAO will give presentations to the committee on issues that affect the SARAO user community. The agenda for this meeting will be agreed between the Chair and the SARAO MD.

5. The Chair will be responsible for organizing and conducting the meetings of the committee, and for preparing its reports and recommendations.

6. The committee will maintain written minutes of its meetings, clearly noting its recommendations.

7. The committee will provide written reports to the SARAO MD.

8. The SARAO MD will respond to the reports and recommendations of the committee.

9. SARAO staff will assist in organizing the logistics of the committee's meetings and recording their minutes.

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