



**Monthly Newsletter of International URSI Commission J – Radio Astronomy**  
April 2020

**Officers**

Chair: Richard Bradley  
Vice-Chair: Douglas Bock

ECRs: Stefan Wijnholds  
Jacki Gilmore

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**News Items - Greetings from the Chair!**

- **GASS 2020 Postponed**  
The COVID-19 pandemic continues. By now you have heard that the GASS 2020 was postponed to 2021 – same location at about the same time. As such, the Commission J program will be carried forward – no significant changes are anticipated. Additional details are provided in the “From the Board” section of the Newsletter.
- The current Commission J Chair, Vice-Chair, and ECRs have all agreed to continue serving URSI in their current positions over the coming year.
- I will continue with the Newsletter over the coming year, but respectfully request your assistance in providing short articles, newsworthy items, photos, etc. Let’s keep the Newsletter interesting and informative.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SARA0 is mandated to manage the production of respiratory ventilators in South Africa. Please see the “In the News” section of the Newsletter for additional information.
- On a sad note, Margaret Burbidge passed away on April 5 at the age of 100. Please see the “In the News” section of the Newsletter for additional information.
- Reminder: Past Newsletters and other URSI Commission J documents are archived at <http://www.ursi.org/commission.php?id=J#tab-section4> .



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## From the Board

### 1. URSI Flagship meetings

As GASS 2020 will become GASS 2021, the Board also decided to postpone all other Flagship meetings as well.. so we just shift everything 1 year as it turned out that for all meetings the venue is confirmed to be still available around the same period:

GASS 2020 becomes GASS 2021 and stays in Rome (end August / early September)

AT-RASC 2021 becomes AT-RASC 2022 and stays in Gran Canaria (end May)

AP-RASC 2022 becomes AP-RASC 2023 and stays in Sydney (August)

GASS 2023 becomes GASS 2024 and stays in Sapporo (August)

EMTS 2022 Moscow was scheduled in May 2022 and would consequently clash with AT-RASC 2022, but they have also confirmed to be willing to shift to EMTS 2023 in Moscow.

Exact dates will be confirmed in the next few weeks, but we basically skip 2020 and continue as normal from 2021 onwards.

*Comment from the Commission J Chair: Although the postponement of GASS to 2021 is understandable, continuing with the new schedule poses a problem for Commission J. Upon learning of this plan, Douglas Bock quickly informed me of the schedule conflict that would exist between future URSI GASS and IAU meetings – both would occur on the same year at about the same time. I alerted the URSI Board of this issue which is now under review.*

### 2. GASS 2020 Meetings

As there will be no physical meeting in Rome in 2020, we will also not have physical meetings for Council, Coordinating Committee and Commission Business Meetings. It is however important to keep URSI running and to keep contact with our community. We are looking to set up a virtual replacement for the Student Paper Competition. Details will follow later. We will also provide a set of possible options to the authors of the submitted / accepted papers on what to do with their paper. Again, more details will follow shortly.

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## **In the News**

### **SARAO mandated to manage the production of respiratory ventilators**

The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition has mandated the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO) to manage the national effort required for the local design, development, production and procurement of respiratory ventilators to support the government's response to combat the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

SARAO has been mandated to manage the National Ventilator Project based on the experience it gained in the development of complex systems for the MeerKAT radio telescope, a precursor to the world's largest Square Kilometre Array radio telescope.

With the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 steadily increasing in South Africa, government has called on companies and experts, particularly engineers and scientists, to come with innovative solutions to help combat the pandemic.

As at 03 April 2020, South Africa had 1,505 confirmed cases of COVID-19. The health ministry expects the number to increase exponentially in the next few weeks as more people get tested.

In an effort to meet the anticipated demand for critical medical equipment such as ventilators, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition is inviting companies and experts to express their interest in the design, development, production and procurement of ventilators in South Africa.

The invitation provides an opportunity for experts and companies to register their interest regarding the goods and services they offer that may be relevant to the National Ventilator Project. Once the specifications are finalised, interested parties will be invited to make a representation of their proposed solutions and the extent to which they would meet the specification.

*Press Release*

### **Passing of Margaret Burbidge**

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of, what many will already know, the passing of Margaret Burbidge on April 5 at the age of 100.

Margaret was a heroic figure in modern astronomy. She was the last remaining author of B2FH which is generally acknowledged as one of the most important research contributions in our field in the 20th century. Four outstanding and creative scientists combined their complementary expertise to create an enduring synthesis which was the culmination of many years work. Their research on stellar nucleosynthesis has been brought once again into focus by the discovery of a pair of merging neutron stars in 2017. Margaret was also a pioneer in the study of active galactic nuclei through her shrewd and

careful optical spectroscopy. Her timely monograph on Quasi-stellar Objects, co-authored with Geoff Burbidge, was very influential. In addition, she contributed much to our evolving understanding of single and binary stars and galaxy rotation curves.

Margaret was a leader in our field, including serving as Director of the Royal Greenwich Observatory (1973-5), President of the American Astronomical Society (1976-78) and President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1983). She received many honors including the National Medal of Science (1983) and the Henry Norris Lectureship (1984). She was a regular attendee at NAS events since her election in 1978.

All of her life, Margaret Burbidge worked hard to eradicate discrimination on the basis of gender, of which she had much personal experience, and to bring about gender equality in astronomy and beyond. She was a role model for all of us and her spirit lives on.

To read more, please see the New York Times obituary  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/science/space/e-margaret-burbidge-dead.html?smid=em-share>

I also recommend her 1994 Annual Reviews memoir, "Watcher of the Skies", which exhibits the wisdom, determination and grace that epitomized Margaret Burbidge's life and scientific career.

I have written to Margaret's daughter, Sarah, both personally and on behalf of the section.

Notes of condolence and remembrance can be sent to Sarah at [sburbidge@mallp.com](mailto:sburbidge@mallp.com)

*A message from Roger Blandford*

