

15th International Laser Ranging Workshop
16-20 October 2006-10-13

Welcome Note

Werner Gurtner
Chairman of the ILRS Governing Board

Dear Dr Ben Greene, dear Dr. Williams,
ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

this is the second time that I have the honor to welcome you to an international laser ranging workshop, and it is also the second time that I attend a laser workshop here in Canberra.

For me it is a special honor to attend this meeting in the country and continent with the top two laser tracking stations of our service: Yarragadee has been leading the chart for years, without danger of ever being relegated to a lower position by any other station. The most recent chart, prepared a few days ago by our Central Bureau, awards Mount Stromlo the silver medal for the number of passes collected during the previous 12 months. All our analysts are extremely pleased with this performance of the Australian stations, because it significantly attenuates the well-known weakness of our tracking network in the southern hemisphere.

We have seen several remarkable achievements since the last workshop in San Fernando, four of which I would like to address:

- With Icesat and Alos we have demonstrated that we can successfully track satellites with vulnerable sensors
- Within a year we have introduced a new orbit prediction system with significant improvements in the satellite acquisition
- We are tracking the first Galileo test satellite, Giove-A, although I think that we have to study how to improve our performance for such weak targets
- I was especially pleased to see the very efficient and fast installation and consolidation of the new Chinese station in San Juan in South America. It will further and significantly improve our coverage of the southern hemisphere.

The two space-geodetic techniques VLBI and SLR still form the basis and nucleus of any research in need of high-precision global positions, especially with regard to the referencing to the center of the earth and the height components or the scale of the earth. It is very disturbing that due to budgetary reasons major contributors to the infrastructure needed to maintain these fundamental activities decide to withdraw their support, as we have learned a few days ago from our Canadian VLBI network, and we also had such experiences in our own ranks.

It is extremely important that we can demonstrate the high quality of our products to our parent organizations to convince them of the necessity of space geodesy for modern research in earth sciences. And we have to carefully avoid any activities or statements that could send wrong signals to the external community. There has to be a

healthy competition among the different space-geodetic techniques, internally, in our groups. However, to publicly play one technique off against the another would be disastrous. We will support our sister service, the International VLBI Service, in its activities to convince the Canadian government to re-evaluate these unfavorable decisions.

I would like to thank the local organizing committee for the excellent preparations for this workshop and the sponsors without which it would not be possible to organize and hold such an event.

I wish you all a fruitful and successful workshop. Please enjoy the various activities prepared for the evenings by our hosts. Some of you may even take the opportunity to append a few days to the workshop to see more of this fascinating country.