

amount of time at our sites in Chile, and after each visit I came away impressed by the dedication and motivation of our personnel in all areas of expertise. The same is true for our staff members in Garching, who provide general user support, develop critical software, coordinate the construction of new instrumentation, and follow developments in technology (both of which include in-house activities). The astronomers have a fraction of their time available for personal research, as this is

crucial for ESO's ability to deliver the best observing facilities for the member states.

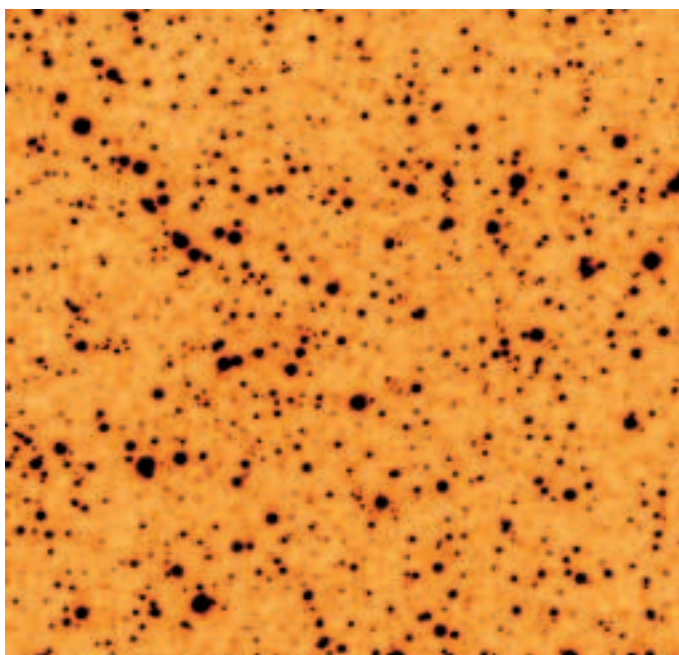
ESO's Fellowship programme deserves special mention. It also has grown over the past decade. A remarkable statistic is that 92 % of all former ESO Fellows are still active in astronomy, many in institutions in the member states. This strengthens the partnership between ESO and the member states in a natural way, contributing to the long-term success of the entire programme.

When the VLT turns 15 in five years time, the medium-sized telescopes on La Silla will be focused on unique long-term science, the VLT and VLTI will be nearing their full potential, and ALMA will be operational. If all goes well, the Extremely Large Telescope will be in construction, and ESO and the member states will already be planning for another world-class ground-based facility. This entire prospect is very exciting and I look forward to being a part of this.

10th Anniversary of First Light of the VLT

On 16 May 1998, 'First Light', in the sense of imaging with active optics and telescope tracking, was obtained with the VLT Test Camera for Unit Telescope 1. The First Light image, which originally appeared in *The Messenger*, No. 92 is reproduced here and shows a 10-min *R*-band image of the globular cluster Omega Centauri. The image was actually obtained before the mirror was coated but has measured image quality (Full Width at Half Maximum) of 0.43 arcsec. The accompanying photograph taken during that period shows the three key staff – Massimo Tarenghi, then director of the Paranal Observatory, Roberto Gilmozzi and Jason Spyromilio – in the VLT control room. All three are still with ESO: Massimo has been ALMA Director, Roberto succeeded Massimo as director of the Paranal Observatory and was himself succeeded by Jason. Both are now working on ESO's next large telescope project – the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT). The understated sense of jubilation at the meeting of performance criteria is well caught in the quotation from the article "The First Steps of UT1" by Tarenghi, Gray, Spyromilio and Gilmozzi, which appeared in *The Messenger* No. 93, printed here.

To mark this anniversary a poster has been produced by the ESO Public Affairs Department (PAD) group and is enclosed with this issue.



VLT UT1 First Light image of Omega Centauri.



Massimo Tarenghi, Roberto Gilmozzi and Jason Spyromilio in the VLT control room in May 1998.

“Although first light was specified for the night of the 25th of May, the internal planning target date was the 15th of May. By this time we had moved out of the hut in the enclosure and were operating the telescope from the relative comfort of the control room. On the night of the 15th of May we decided that we should meet all specifications laid out in the integration plan for the telescope. The target was to be ω Cen. Conditions were excellent:

low wind and good seeing. We started a 10-minute exposure on target with the test camera. We had never tried anything as long as this. Krister Wirenstrand anxiously waited for the test camera CCD to read out. This was to be the first true image taken with the telescope on a scientific CCD. When the image was transferred to the Real Time Display, we quickly measured the image quality. Great jubilation again as the stars ap-

peared at 0.48 arcseconds. A series of other measurements on tracking stability and image quality verified the telescope had met all the performance criteria for first light.”

Tarengi, M., Gray, P., Spyromilio, J. & Gilmozzi, R. 1998, *The Messenger*, 93, 4

Austria Declares Intent to Join ESO

At a press conference held at the University of Vienna Observatory on 24 April 2008, the Austrian Science Minister Johannes Hahn announced the decision by the Austrian Government to seek membership of ESO from 1 July of this year.

Said Minister Hahn: “With membership of ESO, Austria’s scientists will receive direct access to the world’s leading infrastructure in astronomy. This strengthens Austria as a place for research and provides an opportunity for young researchers to continue their work from here. With this move, Austria takes an important step in the reinforcement of Europe’s science and research infrastructure.”

The ESO Director General Tim de Zeeuw responded: “ESO welcomes the Austrian bid to join our organisation. I salute the Austrian Government for taking this important step and look forward to working closely with our Austrian friends and colleagues in the years to come.”

The decision constitutes a major breakthrough for Austrian astronomers who have argued for joining ESO for many years. Membership would mean not only unrestricted access to ESO’s world-leading observational facilities, including the Very Large Telescope and full participation in the international ALMA project, but also the possibility to participate in future projects, including the realisation of the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT), which is currently in its design phase.



All these projects require some of the most advanced technologies in key areas such as optics, detectors, lightweight structures, etc. Austrian participation in ESO opens the door for Austrian industry and major research institutes to take part in the development of such technologies, with their associated potential for industrial spin off.

The main centres for astronomical research in Austria are at the Universities of Graz, Innsbruck and Vienna. Furthermore, scientists in the area of mathematics, applied physics and computer science have already expressed their

From left to right: Prof. Tim de Zeeuw, ESO Director General, Prof. Sabine Schindler, the President of the Austrian Society for Astronomy and Astrophysics, and Dr. Johannes Hahn, the Austrian Science Minister.

interest in contributing to the development of the advanced technologies required for ESO’s future projects.

The Austrian bid for ESO membership was formally approved by the ESO Council at its meeting on 3–4 June and is now subject to ratification by the Austrian Parliament.

(Adapted from ESO Press Release 11/08)