

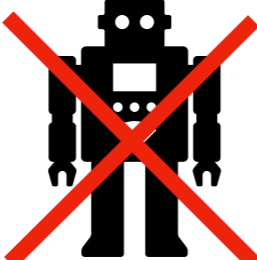
# The Fast Track Channel (FTC)

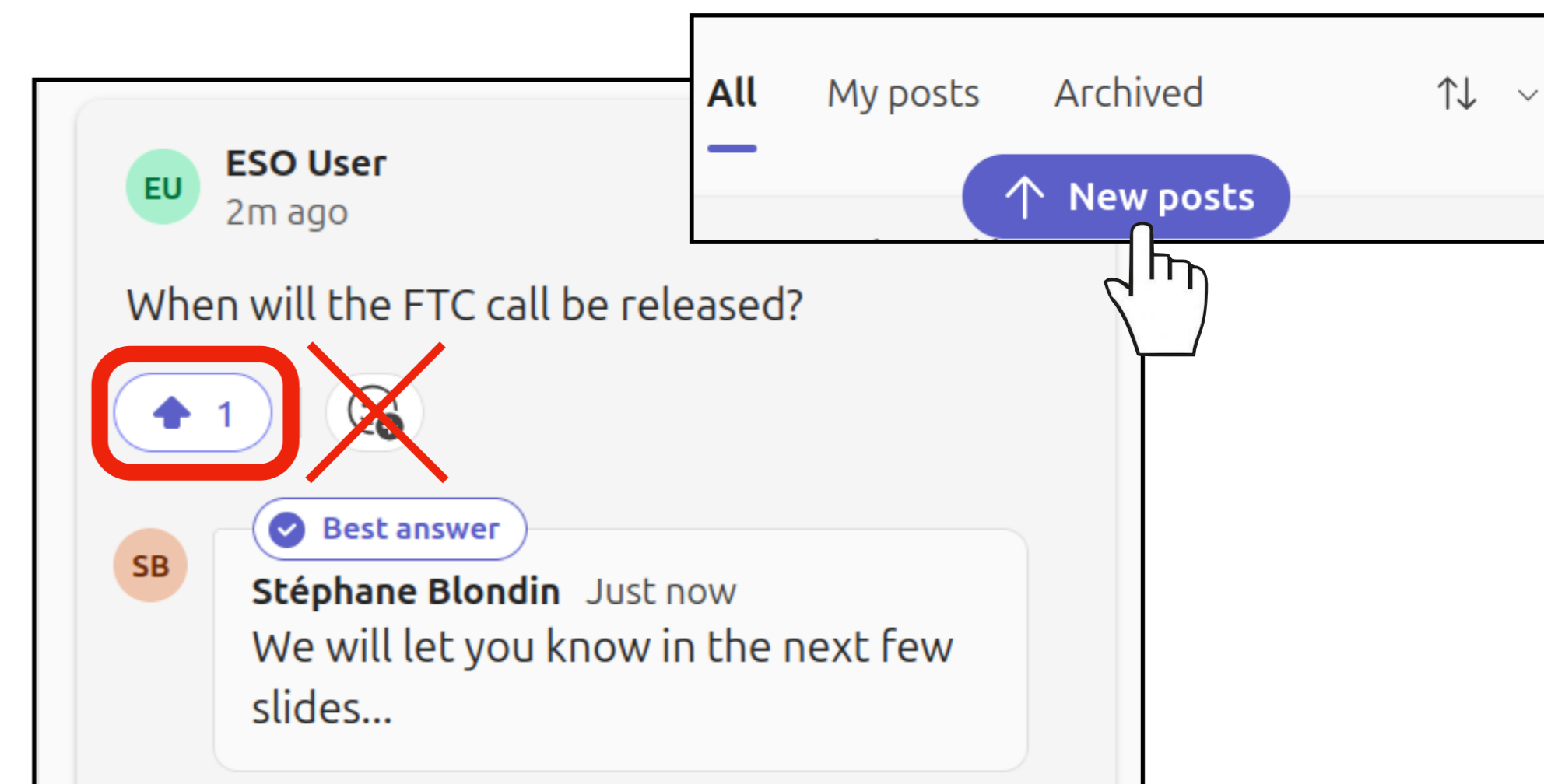
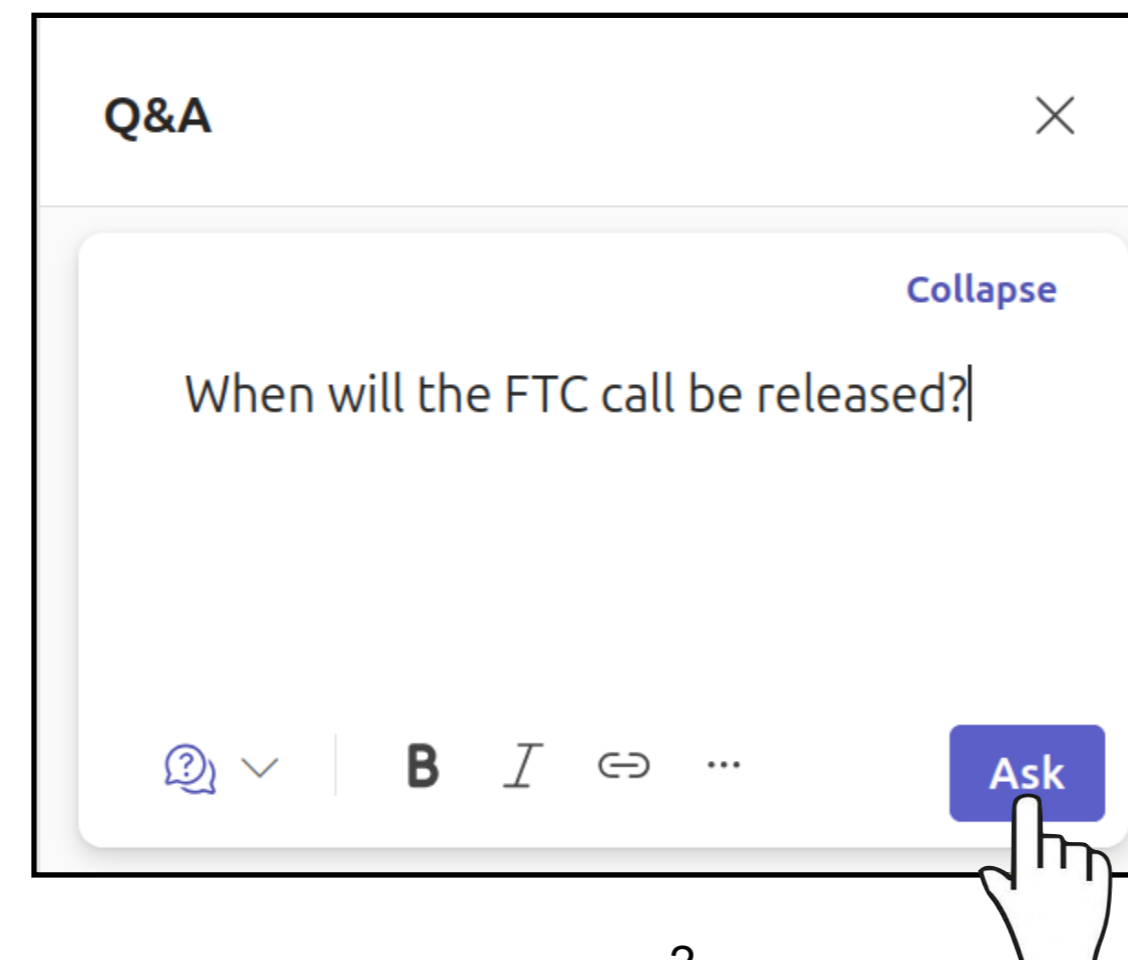
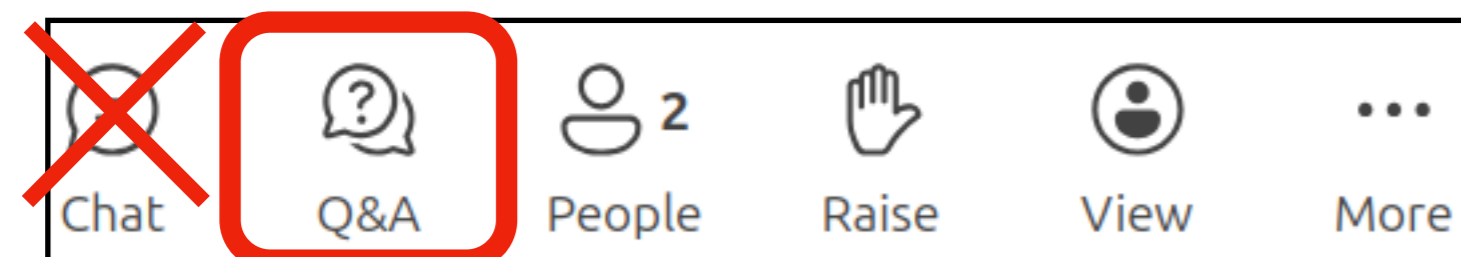
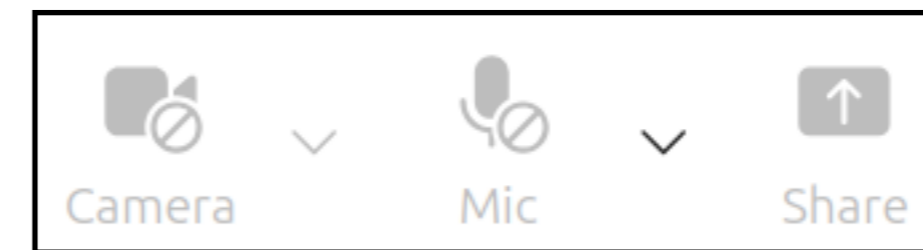
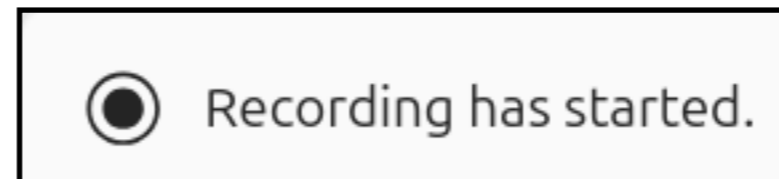
Town Hall meeting and Q&A session

Observing Programmes Office - European Southern Observatory - May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026

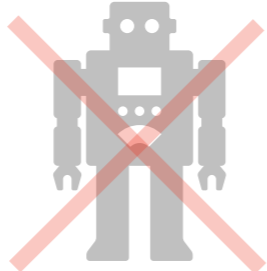


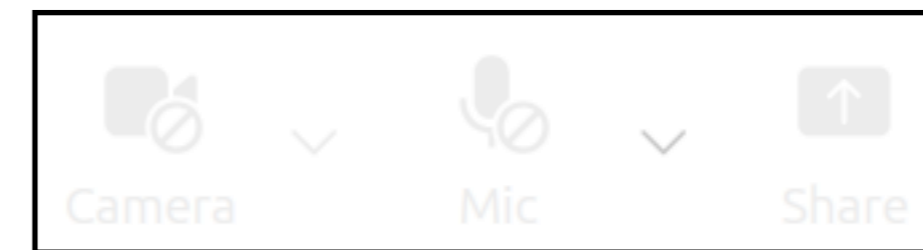
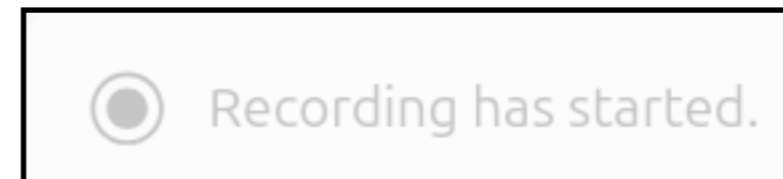
# About this meeting

- This meeting will be **recorded**.
- Participants are **muted by default**.
- **No AI bots**, please. 
- The meeting has a **Q&A function** which allows you to both **ask questions** and **upvote them** during the presentation.



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- We will **answer questions after the presentation in order of priority**.
- We may ask individual participants for more details on their question.
- We expect all participants to follow [ESO's Code of Conduct](#).



# Introduction: Why a Fast Track Channel?

- ESO has moved to a Yearly Cycle (YC) for its regular call for proposals since P117, as a result of recommendations spelled out in the [Time Allocation Working Group \(TAWG\) report](#).
- These recommendations included the parallel introduction of a **Fast Track Channel (FTC)** to compensate for the increased length of the time between calls for proposals (see [Patat et al. 2024](#)).
- The Fast Track Channel is intended to enable rapid access for **new and timely scientific ideas**, not to provide an alternative route for proposals that were unsuccessful in the previous regular cycle.
- If you have questions and/or doubts, please do not hesitate to contact us via the [ESO Operations Helpdesk](#).

# Proposals qualifying for the FTC

The [Call for Proposals](#) contains information regarding the offered modes and instruments both for the main cycle (P117) and the FTC. It is the binding document for the science policies. **Additional criteria** specific for the FTC are:

- Only **VLT or VLTi Normal programmes** with a **maximum time request of 30 hours** can be submitted to the FTC (i.e. no time on La Silla telescopes, no Monitoring, Calibration or Large programmes).
- Observations will be carried out in **Service Mode only** (with the possible conversion to designated Visitor Mode in case of need).
- **GTO programmes will not be offered** for this first FTC call (FTC 117A).
- **Target of Opportunity modes** (Rapid Response Mode, ToO-Hard, ToO-Soft) will be offered.

# Proposals qualifying for the FTC

- Reserved time: **~90 hours per UT** (350h for the VLT, 40h for VLTI-UT, 70h for VLTI-AT).
- There are **no scientific constraints** for proposal eligibility to the FTC.
- **No resubmissions** of a proposal **rejected** in the previous regular Yearly Cycle are allowed.
- **Further restrictions** may be imposed (instruments, RA ranges, conditions...) depending on the status of the execution queues.
- FTC proposals will be evaluated using the same [Distributed Peer Review \(DPR\)](#) system used for some of the proposals submitted to the regular Yearly Cycle.

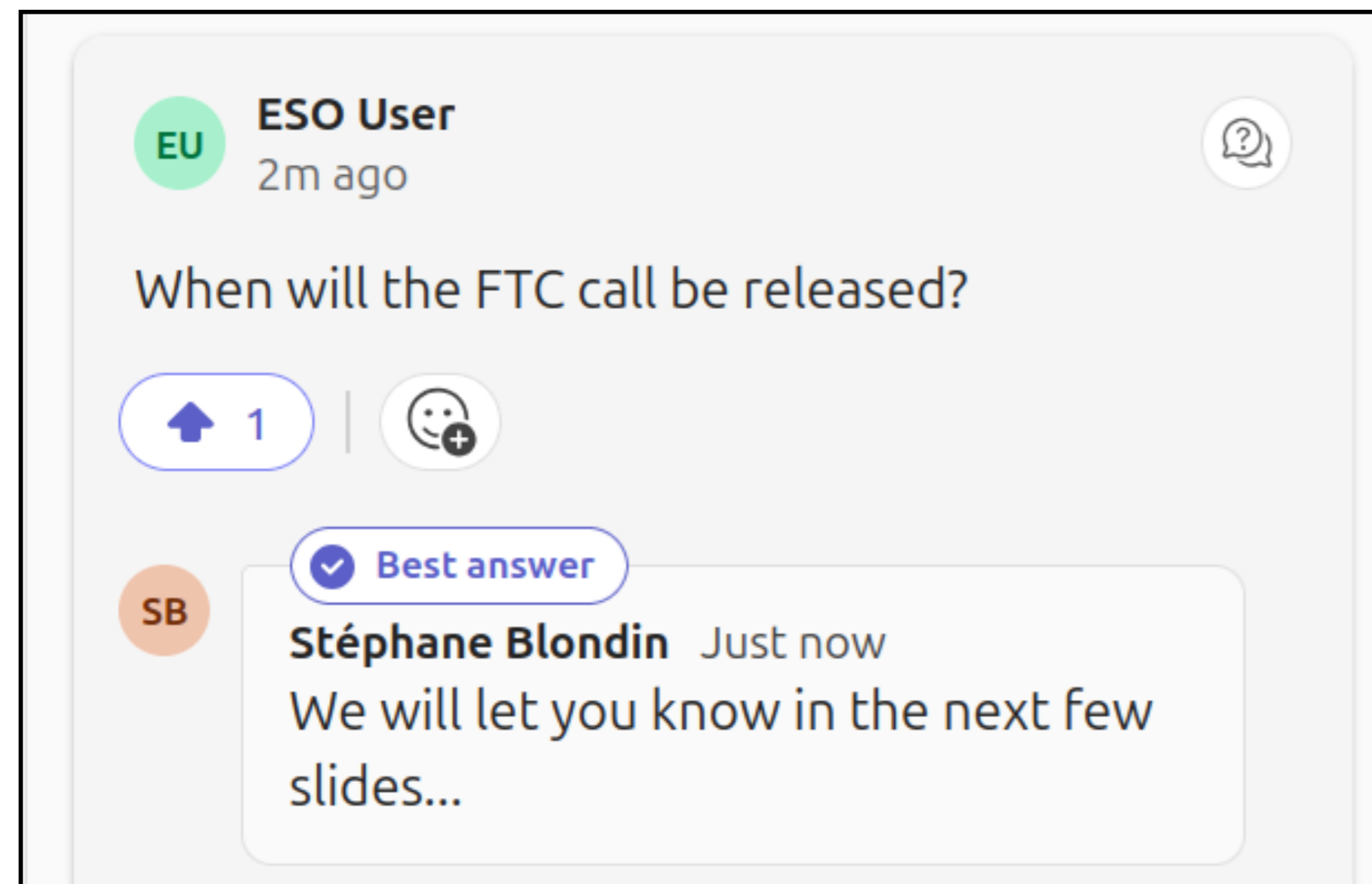
# Available time per telescope

ESO has reserved **~15% of the science time** between September 1st, 2026 and April 30th, 2027 (end of P117) for the Fast Track Channel. **Half of this time** was allocated to the first FTC call 117A.

Telescope	Time (hours)
UT1	80
UT2	95
UT3	90
UT4	85
VLTI-UT	40
VLTI-AT	70

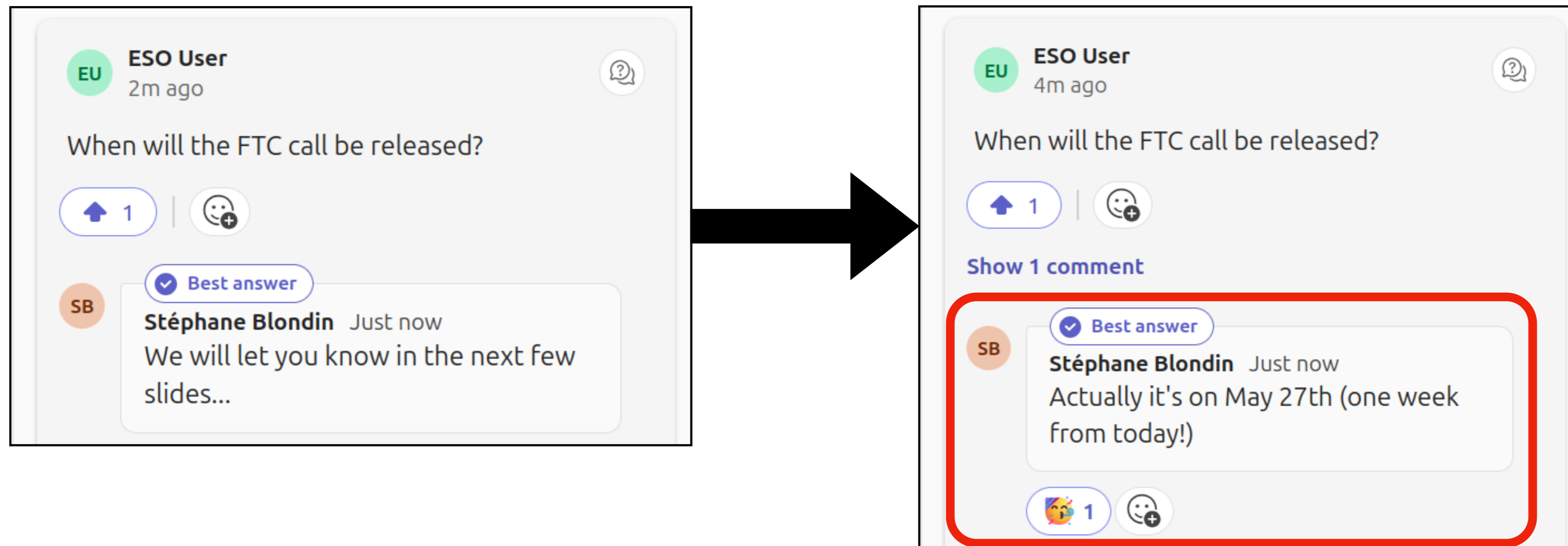
# Tentative timeline for the first FTC call 117A

- Call release: ...



# Tentative timeline for the first FTC call 117A

- **Call release: May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026**. The call will remain open for ~3 weeks.



# Tentative timeline for the first FTC call 117A

- **Call release:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026. The call will remain open for ~3 weeks.
- **Proposal submission deadline:** Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup> (19 days)
- **Proposal review deadline:** Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup> (3 weeks)
- **Results of evaluation:** late July
- **Phase 2 submission deadline:** mid/late August
- **Start of observations:** September 1<sup>st</sup> (or possibly earlier).
- **Observing period duration:** six months (until February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2027).

# What constitutes a resubmission?

- As noted in the [P117 Call for Proposals](#) (p. 5): "a proposal submitted to the FTC will be systematically rejected if it is found to be a resubmission of a proposal previously rejected in the previous YC [*Yearly Cycle*] call."
- This means that proposals submitted to the FTC 117A call cannot be resubmissions of proposals rejected during the regular P117 call.
- A proposal will be considered a resubmission if its **primary science goals, hypotheses, or intended scientific outcomes are substantially the same** as those of a proposal previously submitted by the same (or substantially overlapping) team, regardless of changes in targets, observing setup, or wording.
- The resubmission criteria apply to proposals from the **same PI or substantially overlapping teams** and are not limited to identical author lists.

# Clear resubmission cases

- **Reuse** of the same or only lightly edited scientific justification text.
- **Same science case** with: different targets, slightly modified observing strategy, different instrument configuration.
- Previously rejected proposal re-entered with **cosmetic or incremental changes**.
- **Splitting** a previously rejected programme into smaller proposals without changing the science goal.
- Is the **main scientific question** different? Are the **expected results or impact** meaningfully different?

# Likely acceptable cases

- Proposals addressing **clearly different scientific questions**, even if in the same broader research area.
- **New ideas** motivated by: new theoretical developments, new data, or recent discoveries.
- **Substantially revised concepts** where: the original hypothesis is replaced or fundamentally altered; the expected scientific outcome is different.
- Projects that build on earlier work but pursue a **distinct objective**, not just completion or repetition.
- In **ambiguous cases**, the Observatory reserves the right to determine whether a proposal constitutes a resubmission based on its scientific content and intent.

# FTC justification field

- The Phase 1 proposal form includes a new **mandatory** free-text field entitled **FTC justification**.

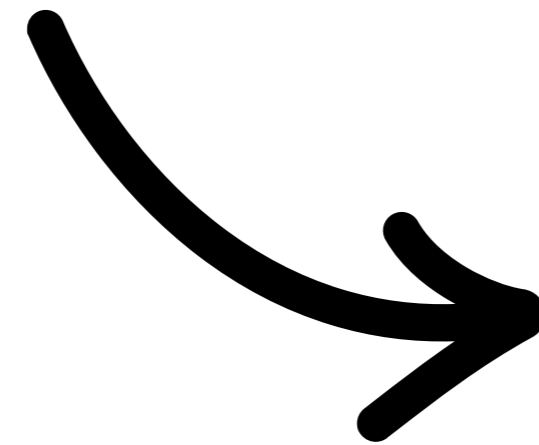
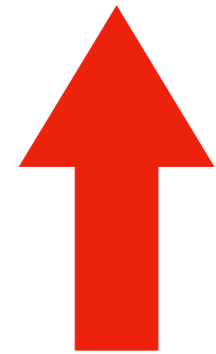
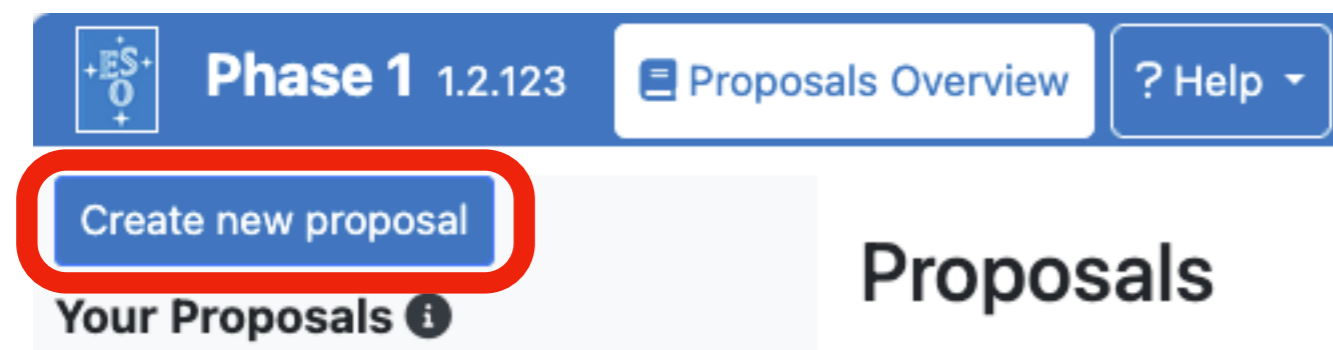
The screenshot shows a web interface for a Phase 1 proposal form. On the left is a navigation sidebar with a blue background and white text. The sidebar is titled "My first Fast Track" and "Channe ..". It contains a list of menu items: Summary, Title & Abstract, Scientific Keywords, Investigators, Rationale, Targets, Runs, Targets → Runs, Observations, Remarks & Justifications (highlighted with a red circle), Awarded & Future Time Requests, Previous Usage, and Applicants' Publications. The main content area is white. At the top is a large empty text box. Below it is a horizontal line. Underneath the line is the "FTC Justification" section. It has a title "FTC Justification" on the left, "0 of 1000 char" on the right, and a button with the Greek letters "ωτλ" and a right-pointing arrow. Below the title is a blue bar with a small "i" icon and the text "[Non-anonymised]". At the bottom of the section is another empty text box.

# FTC justification field

- The Phase 1 proposal form includes a new **mandatory** free-text field entitled **FTC justification**.
- This information will be used **exclusively for internal purposes within ESO** and will not be used in the evaluation of the proposals. It will not be made available to reviewers. As such, the text of this field does **not need to be anonymised**.
- In this field, applicants must explain **why it was not possible to submit** their proposal during the most recent regular call, and **why the proposed observations cannot be deferred** to the next regular call.
- If a similar proposal was submitted by the same team in the previous regular call, applicants should also briefly **describe how the present submission differs from that earlier proposal**.

# Proposal submission, review and scheduling

- The FTC proposals are submitted via the [p1 proposal preparation tool](#) by selecting the appropriate Cycle.



A screenshot of the 'Add Proposal' form. The form has a title 'Add Proposal' and three input fields: 'Proposal Title' with the text 'My first Fast Track Channel proposal', 'Cycle' with a dropdown menu showing 'FTC 117A', and 'Programme Type' with a dropdown menu showing 'Normal'. At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: a red 'Cancel' button and a blue 'Create Proposal' button. A hand cursor is shown clicking on the 'Create Proposal' button.

# Proposal submission, review and scheduling

- The FTC proposals are submitted via the [p1 proposal preparation tool](#) by selecting the appropriate Cycle.
- FTC proposals will be reviewed via a **Distributed Peer Review (DPR)**. The same [rules and guidelines for the DPR](#) as in the regular Yearly Cycle will apply.
- The **grade distribution** of the FTC proposals will be **normalised** to the overall panels grade distribution of the associated regular Yearly Cycle.
- The **time reserved for the FTC** will be filled using the proposal ranking provided by the FTC review.
- The **10% fraction of Chilean time allocation** will be computed on the full allocation per Period (i.e., yearly, not per single FTC call).

# Proposal submission, review and scheduling

- The **same cutoff grades** attained for the regular cycle will be applied to the FTC on a telescope per telescope basis.
- Proposals **below the grade cutoff of the regular Yearly Cycle** programmes at the given telescope will not be scheduled.
- **Poorly graded FTC proposals** requiring poor observing conditions **may be allocated as fillers** in the C-rank queue to the discretion of the Observatory.
- FTC runs inserted in the queues will have the priority which pertains to their rank. Once queued, there will be **no difference with respect to runs from the regular Yearly Cycle**.
- If an **FTC call goes undersubscribed**, part of the time originally reserved for the FTC will be filled in with the highest-ranked, non-allocated runs of the associated regular Yearly Cycle.

# Offered instruments and restrictions / 1

- All instruments and instrument modes offered for the VLT/VLTI in the regular P117 cycle are available, **except for visitor instruments** (since Visitor Mode is not offered). See the [Call for Proposals for P117](#).
- **GTO programmes will not be offered** for this first FTC call.
- ESPRESSO will be offered in **1-UT mode only**.
- **No RA restrictions** are envisaged at this stage.

# Offered instruments and restrictions / 2

- For VLTI-UT there is **no available time for turbulence category 30% or better**. However, VLTI-UT proposals requiring more relaxed constraints are encouraged:
  - Turbulence category  $> 50\%$  and Sky transparency = CLR
  - Turbulence category =  $50\%$  and Sky transparency = THN
  - LGS-VIS mode on GRAVITY and MATISSE: limiting magnitude  $G_{RP} = 15.5$
- The Observatory expects to keep the **same distribution of VLTI baselines**, i.e., no changes to the scheduled VLTI-UT nights, and **only minor adjustments for VLTI-AT** if needed by the top ranked FTC proposals.
- Applicants should check the distribution of the baseline configurations scheduled during P117 in the [Observatory schedule](#), after selecting the desired range of dates on the top left menu of the interface.



# Run validity and carry-over for FTC 117A

- The time for FTC 117A is offered for observations to be carried out starting on **September 1st, 2026** and extending for six months.
- Approved, **non-completed A-rank FTC runs will be carried over** until the end of P117 (April 30th, 2027).
- **B-rank FTC runs will be terminated** at the end of the FTC validity range.
- FTC runs allocated in designated Visitor Mode (dVM) will **not be compensated** for possible weather losses.

# Outlook

- The **future FTC time fraction** (currently 15%) and **maximum time request per proposal** (currently 30h) will be tuned based on the outcome of the FTC 117A call, to keep the oversubscription similar to that of the regular Yearly Cycle.
- A **possible second FTC call** (117B) will be considered based on the community response to FTC 117A.
- The plan is to **reduce the duty cycle**<sup>[\*]</sup> from ~3 months to ~2 months.

*[\*] This is defined as the time from the submission deadline to the start of first observations.*

# The Fast Track Channel (FTC)

Town Hall meeting and Q&A session

Observing Programmes Office - European Southern Observatory - May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026

