

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA OPENING THE GREENHILL
OBSERVATORY AND THE HARLINGTEN TELESCOPE ON
BISDEE TIER, SATURDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2013**

It is a great pleasure for me and my wife to welcome you all to the formal opening of a most exciting scientific development here on the top of Bisdee Tier; the Greenhill Observatory with its Harlingten 1.27 telescope. I have to add that I feel very honoured to have been asked to perform the opening ceremony. In February 2010 I was equally honoured when asked to open the Mount Pleasant radio telescope, but to make sure that there is no misunderstanding I feel that I should confess, as I did at Mount Pleasant, that it is almost certain that I am the least scientifically informed person here present on this special occasion. My knowledge of astronomy is extremely limited and my knowledge of astrophysics non-existent but, even though ignorant of such matters, I can still get excited when I learn what a difference this telescope will make to those sciences and to the work of astronomers and astrophysicists from around the world.

Insulated from the light pollution that inhibited the effectiveness of the smaller telescope at Mount Canopus, I learned that, with this H127 telescope, scientists at UTAS will be able to play a significant role in major international projects designed to detect Earth-like planets in the Milky Way, measure their frequency of occurrence and discover the physical processes that underlie the formation and evolution of habitable solar systems like our own. I understand that this is a major effort in modern astrophysics and one of the highest priorities for astronomers worldwide over the next

decade. I also understand that, when coupled to its scientific cameras, the telescope will routinely observe stars up to thirty thousand light years away (across the entire Milky Way galaxy), and be capable of observing stars up to ten times farther (in the Local Group of galaxies). Supernovae and other galaxies will be visible out to millions of light-years away. Now, I don't want to exaggerate the extent of my knowledge here. I do not know what a scientific camera looks like, nor why they are so important, but I am able to grasp the enormity of the proposition that this telescope and its associated scientific equipment has the capacity to reveal the existence of other galaxies millions of light years away from Earth. I also understand that it, and other scientific equipment for the telescope, was acquired as a result of Dr Andrew Cole, UTAS lecturer in astronomy, receiving a grant from the Australia Research Council to enable collaboration with astronomers at the Australian National University Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics, the Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris, and the University of Warsaw Observatory.

I also understand very clearly that this telescope and its associated scientific equipment will attract scientists world-wide. I am told that the Observatory is expected to host up to 20 visiting scientists per year, in blocks ranging from several days to several months. These visitors will be able to stay at the lodge here, receiving hands-on training in the telescope's operation from UTAS staff. Further, this wonderful telescope, its enclosure and its environmental monitors have been designed from the ground up to

be remotely operable, allowing UTAS astronomers and their collaborators world-wide to utilise the telescope efficiently, safely and at low running cost. It puts UTAS right up at the cutting edge of astronomy with the best scientists in the world. Those responsible for this development should rightly feel proud of their work.

I must tell you that I had a practical lesson on how the Internet had facilitated the remote operation of telescopes when I spoke at the 2010 Annual Scientific Meeting and General Meeting of the Astronomical Society of Australia held in Hobart. It was a relatively small meeting - some of you were probably there and will recall how those present were bent over their laptops during the course of the proceedings. I spoke with the Chair after the meeting and said it was very gratifying to see that my address had obviously generated such interest and, as he looked a little perplexed, added, "You know they all were taking down notes of my address." He said, "Oh that, well actually I think you will find that they were all remotely operating their telescopes and other scientific equipment while you were speaking"!

The success of the project to build an observatory complete with administration offices, observers' quarters and control room and to install in it a huge telescope and associated scientific equipment is due to the hard work and generosity of many people. I pay tribute to the them all especially Dr Caisey Harlinton, founder and President of the Search Light Observatory Network whose incredible

generosity provided all the components of the telescope, its design and costs of construction as well as the costs of shipping it to Tasmania. I congratulate the man who has been described as the instigator of this project, Dr John Greenhill, who recently received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for an Outstanding Contribution by a Voluntary Position Holder and after whom this Observatory has been named. Congratulations also go to the Chair, Dr Peter Davis and all the members of the Optical Observatory Fundraising Committee for the work they did raising funds, the University Foundation for managing the funds raised, and of course to all the generous donors whose names are listed on the plaque that has been erected here in the Observatory. There are many more people I could mention. There is Professor Dickey of course and also the other scientists like for example, Dr Tony Sprent, all of whom have generously done and given so much to see this telescope installed. I thank them all.

The 62nd meeting of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution¹ in 2009 to support the declaration that 2009 be the Year of Astronomy and stated that it was doing so in order to highlight the importance of astronomical sciences and their contribution to knowledge and development. The resolution recited that the General Assembly:

¹ United Nations 62nd General Assembly IYA2009 Resolution text (62/200).

“[was] *Aware* that astronomy is one of the oldest basic sciences and that it has contributed and still contributes fundamentally to the evolution of other sciences and applications in a wide range of fields,

[that it recognised] that astronomical observations have profound implications for the development of science, philosophy, culture and the general conception of the universe, [and]

[it noted] that, although there is a general interest in astronomy, it is often difficult for the general public to gain access to information and knowledge on the subject.”

The work that this telescope will do in the hands of an international coterie of astronomers and astrophysicists led by UTAS scientists will indeed contribute fundamentally to the evolution of other sciences and applications in a wide range of fields and have profound implications for the development of science, philosophy, culture and the general conception of the universe. Tasmanians should be proud that this Observatory, part of an international group of Observatories, has been set up on our island State and I wish all those who use it success in their scientific endeavours.