

FOREWORD



Professor Tim de Zeeuw
*Chairman of the
ING Board*

It is a pleasure to write this foreword to the 2000/2001 Bi-annual Report of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes, on behalf of the ING Board.

The past two years have been very interesting ones for the ING, but at the same time quite difficult. The ING telescopes continue to deliver science of the highest quality. The ING staff also carries out increasingly complex instrument enhancement and development work on island. Recent highlights include, e.g., the discovery of star streams in the halo of the Andromeda galaxy with the INT, the commissioning of NAOMI on the WHT providing spectacular image improvement in the R-band, the very well-attended conference entitled 'The central kpc of Starbursts and AGN: the La Palma Connection', organized by the ING, and the mini symposium to mark the occasion of Paul Murdin's retirement. The strong international position of the ING was confirmed by an External Review in 2001, chaired by professor Ken Freeman.

In early 2001 PPARC announced the need to reduce the UK financial contribution from 2005 onwards. Building on recommendations from the Freeman Report, the Board responded by developing a plan which would leave the Dutch contribution at its present level, and increase the proportion of Spanish (IAC) time on the telescopes by 9% (at the expense of the UK share), in return for a significant IAC contribution to operations. A revised ING agreement has now been negotiated between PPARC, NWO and the IAC, which takes into account the reduced UK contribution, the very welcome continuation of Dutch support at the same level, and the additional contribution by the IAC. While this does require a significant restructuring of the ING, it minimizes the impact of the reduced UK financial contribution without damaging the ING's ability to deliver the high priority science program, in particular on the WHT. The increased involvement of Spain through the IAC transforms the ING into a three-way partnership which will help foster the development of a Common Center for Astrophysics on La Palma.

Implementing the plans for restructuring is perhaps the most significant and serious challenge in the history of the ING, but the Board is convinced that the Director and his management team are up to this difficult and painful task. The Board has been encouraged by the progress made to date, and notes that a cooperative attitude of the respective funding agencies has been essential.

Adaptive Optics (AO) will form a critical component for the future of the ING, and the Board has encouraged the Director to further the high scientific profile and potential of the AO development work. The next step is the commissioning of OASIS, an integral-field spectrograph built by Observatoire de Lyon, which is being transferred from the CFHT, upgraded, and then moved to the WHT. Furthermore, the Board was very pleased to receive the welcome news that NWO has accepted a proposal led by the Director to provide funds towards the development of a laser guide star facility for the WHT, conditional on PPARC also supporting this project. The resulting system could be on the telescope in 2005, and produce very exciting and unique imaging and spectroscopic science in the R and I bands that will be hard to beat with 8m class telescopes for many years to come.

It has been an honour and a pleasure to serve as Board Chair for three years. I am confident that the helm is in good hands with the appointment of Professor Janet Drew as my successor, starting in July 2002, and wish her and the ING all the best for the future.