Did you know that scientists in the School of Physics and the ISS Alumni Association are winners in the Federal Government’s budget with $160.5 million being put towards space and astronomy research? Around half of this funding - $80 million - will go towards increasing Australia’s chances of hosting the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the world’s biggest and most sensitive radiotelescope. Western Australia is one of two possible locations in the world for the telescope facility; the other is in South Africa.

The budget provides $80 million for the Australian National Centre of SKA Science in Perth, which will manage the huge amount of data flowing from the Australian SKA Pathfinder radiotelescope and later the SKA. University of Sydney astronomers are involved in the SKA project through the SKA Molongolo Prototype where new technology for the SKA (artist’s illustration above) is being developed and tested.

Other astronomy projects to be funded in the budget are $20.9 million for Australia to take sole responsibility for the Anglo-Australian Observatory, home of Australia’s largest optical/infrared telescope, and $10 million to construct state-of-the-art instruments and data acquisition infrastructure to store, process and analyse information captured from different next-generation telescopes. As part of the $160.5 million for space and astronomy research, $40 million has been allocated in the budget for a new Australian Space Research Program to support space research, innovation and skills development in areas of national significance. There is also $8.6 million allocated to establish a Space Policy Unit, which will provide whole-of-Government advice on space and industry development.

Professor Iver Cairns, from the School of Physics, is Chair of the Steering Committee of the National Committee for Space Science who is putting together the first Australian decadal plan for space science. "This budget has truly exciting news for the Australian space science community. We have been working together across institutions for several years to convince government, industry and academia that space science and space, more generally, should be national priorities and are at a stage that's ready for Government investment," said Cairns. "It's a historic moment - this is the first time the Australian Government has created a dedicated Space Research program with a dedicated Space Science Program. It's wonderful news for space scientists. In addition to the $48.6 million for space research, the budget provides funding for other space science initiatives, specifically in Earth observation such as the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network, climate science, and several others under the Super Science initiative category."

International Year of Astronomy (IYA) Event

Sun, Moon and Stars: The Development of the Classical Athenian Calendar is a public lecture by Professor Robert Hannah (University of Otago) to be given on Thursday 18 June - Societies throughout the ancient world used the sun, moon and stars to mark, measure and tell the time through the days, months and years. One problem they faced is that months measured by the moon do not easily coordinate with seasons measured by the sun. Ancient Greek civic calendars were moon-based and yet also had to provide appropriate dates for seasonal festivals. At the end of the 5th century BC the Athenian astronomer Meton successfully devised a cycle that coordinated lunar and solar time over periods of 19 years. This lecture will examine how Meton achieved this. Details are:

Time: 6:30pm Location: Nicholson Museum (Quadrangle) Cost: $25, $20 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum Contact: Museum Reception on 02 9351 2812 Email: s.fraser@usyd.edu.au
For more information visit: http://www.usyd.edu.au/museums

Indigenous Science Scholars Get Girl Power

The Professor Harry Messel International Science School (ISS) will start on 12 July and run until 25 July 2009. This year the ISS, aptly themed, Genes to Galaxies, (acknowledging Darwin and Astronomy anniversaries) has attracted top quality applications from Indigenous Australian students. The selection committees involved stated that it was very encouraging to see such a high standard of applications across the board. The ISS offers five places to Indigenous Year 11 and 12 students to encourage tertiary study in science. The ISS2009 will see the attendance of five (pretty excited!) female students. Ranging from Humpty Doo in the Northern Territory to Tuncurry in New South Wales the girls are eager to meet the other like-minded students and to see what life at uni is like. We congratulate all the girls and look forward to welcoming them to the 35th ISS. In fact, hearty congratulations to all successful ISS2009 scholars.

In Brief

The School of Physics is very keen to highlight the careers of our alumni. One way we do this is to collect business cards, which we frame and hang along the longest corridor in the University of Sydney. Students can see the industries and organizations where our graduates now work as well as the positions they hold. If you would like to contribute please mail your business card to: Alison Muir, Science Foundation for Physics, School of Physics (A28), The University of Sydney NSW 2006.