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REVIEW OF THE SETI POST-DETECTION AND REPLY PROTOCOLS: CURRENT ACTIONS
AND DEVELOPMENTS

Abstract

The International Academy of Astronautics, acting through its committee on SETI, prepared the “Declaration of Principles Concerning Activities Following the Detection of Extraterrestrial Intelligence” to guide the procedures for verification and announcement of the confirmed detection of extraterrestrial intelligence. These SETI Post-Detection Protocols were followed by the “Draft Declaration of Principles Concerning Sending Communications with Extraterrestrial Intelligence.” The Protocols have been approved and endorsed by institutions and individuals concerned with the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, including the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

In the quarter century following the preparation of the Protocols, the discipline of SETI has seen significant advances in instrumentation and observational techniques, more sophisticated theoretical calculations and arguments, and a growing awareness of how to exploit astronomical data from a wide range of wavelengths for signs of intelligence. In addition, revolutionary changes have occurred in the forms of media and information dissemination on which the original Protocols were based.

The SETI Protocols were revised in 2010, however, the revisions have not been adequate to keep pace with SETI’s recent scientific and technological advances. Moreover, the 2010 revisions did not address the transformation in information dissemination away from print and other traditional forms of mass communication to the ubiquitous social media. Recent studies have shown a clear need to re-examine the Protocols to consider both the advances in science and technology as well as the new forms of information distribution, which can place the credibility of SETI and the safety of researchers at risk if not dealt with appropriately.

This paper reports on the progress of the review of the Protocols which was initiated by the IAA Permanent SETI Committee during the 68th International Astronautical Congress in Adelaide in September, 2017. The current status of this review is discussed, together with the methodology employed, including efforts to engage in a wide-ranging consultation with the SETI community, the international scientific community, and the general public. Activities relating to this review during COSPAR 2018 are discussed. Additional efforts are identified to facilitate a frank, open dialogue, that ensures as comprehensive a review as possible with the goal of achieving widely accepted, clearly articulated SETI Protocols that will be universally respected.