

48th IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

Author: Ms. Lori Walton
Tigerstar Geoscience, Canada

THE HISTORY OF THE IAA SETI PERMANENT COMMITTEE - 1980 TO 1989

Abstract

This paper is the second in a series outlining the history of the SETI Permanent Committee (SETI Committee). The SETI (search for extraterrestrial intelligence) Committee was established in 1974 by its parent organization, the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA) in response to growing awareness after the launch of Sputnik in 1957 that humans might detect or encounter extraterrestrial life, including intelligent life. The SETI Committee has an incredibly broad mandate. It is charged with examining all aspects of the search for extraterrestrial intelligent life including international issues, astrophysical and astronomical observations, biochemistry, exoplanets, complex life and evolution, planetary missions, SETI search strategies, and societal impacts of the detection of extraterrestrial intelligent life. The IAA SETI Committee, now in its 45th year, is the only international body that meets annually to organize symposia, select papers for publication, collaborate with other organizations, and exchange information on SETI topics. Between 1980 and 1989 the SETI Committee addressed several areas of interest including, but not limited to, SETI search technical parameters and results, SETI search strategies, radio frequency interference, and SETI international policy initiatives. Following up on its session in 1977 with the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the SETI Committee looked at the legal, political, and social implications of the detection of an ETI signal, and drafted the 'Declaration of Principles Concerning Activities Following the Detection of Extraterrestrial Intelligence.' The document was approved by the Board of Trustees of the IAA and by the Board of Directors of the International Institute of Space Law in 1989; however, it remains controversial, particularly in regards to the topic of potential transmissions from earth in response to a signal. During the 1980s approximately 30 SETI search programs were underway or completed, a large-scale NASA SETI program was under development, the SETI Institute in California, U.S.A. was established, and the search for extrasolar planets intensified. The IAA SETI Committee continued its work throughout the 1980s with an expanded focus on the societal and cultural impact of detecting evidence of extraterrestrial intelligent life in the universe.