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REVISING THE SETI POST-DETECTION PROTOCOLS FOR THE 2020S AND BEYOND: A REPORT ON WORK IN PROGRESS

Abstract

In 1989, the International Academy of Astronautics adopted the "Declaration of Principles Concerning Activities Following the Detection of Extraterrestrial Intelligence", also known as the SETI Post-Detection Protocols. These provided a set of guiding principles to be followed in the event of a putative signal detection, having been developed by the IAA SETI Permanent Committee over a period of several years starting in the late 1980s, and subsequently approved by the IISL, and endorsed by COSPAR, the IAU, and the IAF. A streamlined update to reflect the emergence of the Internet was developed by the IAA SETI Permanent Committee and accepted in 2010.

Since then, the nature of global communication has been dramatically changed by social media, and multiple SETI 'false alarms' have demonstrated the ways in which information moves in our present era. Simultaneously, SETI searches – now also known technosignatures searches – have radically expanded in extent, scope, and power, with substantial search efforts underway at Breakthrough Listen, the SETI Institute, and FAST, between them using many of the world's most powerful telescopes. Moreover, upcoming next-generation telescopes will allow the detection of molecules indicative of the existence of life in exoplanet atmospheres, and the detection of the equivalent of an airport radar 1000 light years away.

In 2022, the IAA SETI Permanent Committee decided that changes such as these make it a high priority to update the 2010 IAA Declaration of Principles. A proposal for a small task group with the sole task of updating the Post Detection Protocol was initiated at the end of 2022, and co-chairs put in place to develop the proposal. We present a report on the progress on the formation of the task group and its deliberations.