

Annual Report 2019 – Paul Hatchman, Vice President Crago

It is my pleasure to present the Vice-President Crago report for 2019.

It's been another busy year at Crago. We had 7 clear nights this year, with average visitor numbers of around 28. Two of the highlights were visits by the Murray Farm scout group in April and the Hawkesbury Camera Club in June.

On the June last quarter, twenty-two members of the Hawkesbury camera club made their way to set up on the observing field outside Crago, each with their own camera and tripod. It was spectacular to see so many cameras on the field, all pointed at the South Celestial Pole.

I am also pleased to announce that work has started on building a new 22" telescope for the observatory. We will be using the optics from Scott Mellish's 22" telescope (Darth Vader), which his family donated to the Society. Peter Read from SDM Telescopes is building the telescope and we will hopefully receive it before end of next year. This will be an important upgrade to the observatory and help us overcome some of the creeping light pollution, which gets worse every year, as the North Richmond area is opened up to more housing development.

Now, on to less pleasant news. The Society is still without a lease for the land on which the Crago observatory sits. Those who have followed this sad and depressing tale of dealing with government bureaucracy will already know that the lease is held up waiting on the determination of an Aboriginal Land Claim over the site. But fear not, this land claim has been prioritised! After only three short years, the claim is now with the Minister to make a determination. This is where it has been sitting for the last 6 months.

If the Minister denies the land claim, and no appeal is lodged, we will then ask the Government to issue us with a final lease for signing. Which will hopefully be end of the matter for another 20 years. However, if the land claim is granted, the site will be owned by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. We would then need to negotiate with the NSWALC for a lease or other arrangement to allow us to stay on the site.

I would like to give a special thanks to Alex Comino, Darren Jones and Richard Jaworski for helping with the lease negotiations this year. They have all been working behind the scenes and been a great help to me. It is impossible to say how much longer this process will take until there is a determination on the Land Claim and then the inevitable appeal.

Over the next 12 months, we plan to prepare the observatory for the installation of the new telescope. We will also upgrade the solar power system and carry out some repairs to the observatory dome.

We are still short on regular volunteers to help to run the open nights. If you are interested to help, even if only for 1 or 2 nights a year, please get in touch with me. Any assistance would be gratefully received.

I would like to thank our regular volunteers, Richard Jaworski, Ian Parr, Mick McCullagh and Les Sara. Without them, we would not be able to offer this wonderful facility to our members or the public.

For a site that's an hour's drive from most of our members, Crago offers a great viewing experience with steady seeing and semi-rural skies. There's plenty of space for members to set up their telescopes for viewing or imaging. I'd encourage you all to come and join us for a night of observing at least once during the year. Perhaps at our Christmas party in November.