

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



UTAS helping global space venture

The UTAS Mount Pleasant radio telescope will be part of a world-wide network of telescopes combining forces to map three quasars which are billions of light years away this week.

Quasars are the most energetic phenomena in the universe, producing jets of material accelerated almost to the speed of light by super-massive black holes.

Telescopes from all over the world are joining together for the first time to collect data simultaneously for 33 hours this week, which will then be collated to form images.

The observation is being co-ordinated by European institute JIVE (Joint Institute for Very Long Baseline Interferometry in Europe) as part of a demonstration at the opening event for the International Year of Astronomy 2009 in Paris.

Signals from all over the world will be transmitted via the internet to JIVE.

Very Long Baseline Interferometry refers to the simultaneous observation of the heavens by multiple radio telescopes.

Astronomers from the UTAS School of Maths and Physics, Dr Jim Lovell and Professor John Dickey, will be running the Hobart component of the experiment, which they said would effectively create a telescope “the size of the earth.”

“The resolution will be about 100 times better than the Hubble Space Telescope.

“For decades we had to record data and bring it back together by shipping it on tapes or discs - but networking has made it possible to combine it simultaneously.

“It has been a dream for years to accomplish this- it’s like a giant machine with all these connections that begin to move all together,” Professor Dickey said.

Dr Jim Lovell said the telescopes would be examining “three quasars with jets of material emitted by a giant black hole and moving close to the speed of light.”

The worldwide VLBI observation is part of the International Year of Astronomy, proclaimed for 2009 by UNESCO and the International Astronomical Union.

A map showing the array of telescopes to be used can be obtained from http://www.expres-eu.org/PHOTOS/worldmap_IYA.png

More information on this event is available from http://www.expres-eu.org/IYA2009_opening.html

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