



Embargoed until 00.00hrs 26 January 2010

'Out of this World' Honour for Australian Astronomer

Professor Fred Watson, Astronomer-in-Charge of the Anglo-Australian Observatory, and one of Australia's best-known science communicators, has been honoured for his services to astronomy. On Australia Day, January 26, Fred was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia.

'It's truly an out-of-this-world experience to find yourself in the Australia Day honours list,' said Fred. 'We live in an era when astronomy and space science are exploding with new discoveries, so it's quite easy to spread the excitement around. This honour reflects the generous support I've had over the years from friends and colleagues in Australia and worldwide.'

Fred has been Astronomer-in-Charge at the AAO since 1995, having previously worked at the Royal Greenwich Observatory and the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh. Acknowledged in professional circles as one of the pioneers of fibre optics in astronomy, Fred is currently Project Manager for the international RAVE survey of a million stars. He holds adjunct professorships in the University of Southern Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University.

It is for Fred's popular science that he is best known. His frequent appearances on ABC radio and TV, together with his books, public lectures and astronomy tourism expeditions, have resulted in several awards. They include the David Allen Prize for Communicating Astronomy to the Public, the Australian Government Eureka Prize for Promoting Understanding of Science and the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Science Writing for his book *Why is Uranus Upside Down?* In 2004, asteroid 5691 was named 'Fredwatson' in his honour (though he is always at pains to point out that if it hits the Earth, it won't be his fault).

Fred's enthusiasm for linking science and the arts also led to a solo CD, *An Alien Like You*, featuring some of his quirky science songs. At the other end of the musical spectrum, Fred was librettist for *Star Chant*, the choral Fourth Symphony of Australian composer Ross Edwards. Following its release on an ABC CD, *Star Chant* won the APRA Award for Best Choral or Vocal Work of 2008.

Fred was born in Yorkshire, but is proud of his Australian citizenship. 'Australia still has wonderful opportunities not available elsewhere', he says. He was educated in Scotland at the universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh, and is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, a member of the Astronomical Society of Australia, and a member of the International Astronomical Union. Fred serves on a number of astronomy-related committees, but he is also a keen advocate for publicly-funded education, and is a Board Member of the Public Education Foundation of NSW.

Contact details: email; fgw@aao.gov.au
Mobile: 0420 897 860