

EAS statement on the uncertainty surrounding JWST funding

The following statement has been sent by the President of EAS to Dr John Holdren, Director of the USA Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in reaction to the uncertainty surrounding continued funding of the JWST.

European astronomers follow with great concern the evolution of the situation of the JWST project, as they are convinced that its cancellation would cause severe damage to the advancement of astronomy worldwide.

JWST promises to be one of the world leading instruments for the coming decade in astronomy. Following on the achievements of the Hubble Space Telescope, it will focus on the many questions related to the origins of planets, stars and galaxies. It is expected to be unsurpassed in scope and capabilities. In addition, many major developments in world astronomy, like the ALMA array and the giant telescope E-ELT, are being designed and developed taking into account the expected capabilities of JWST. Together these instruments will bring mankind to the next step in the understanding of the Cosmos. JWST is an essential part of this development. The loss of JWST would therefore damage astronomy in a major way in the USA, in Europe and in the world.

Many European astronomers and their funding agencies, together with colleagues in the USA and in Canada, have invested considerable resources and efforts in this project, in particular for the development of the MIRI and NIRSpec instruments. European astronomers within the instrument teams, and also very many others with no project involvement, have planned research programs for the coming years building on JWST capabilities, trusting that it will be launched as planned.

It would be a tragedy if JWST ended up as unfinished space hardware in a museum, leaving generations of future young scientists to wonder what "might have been" had it flown in space. Astronomers are hopeful and confident that solutions can be found that will do justice to the efforts and funds already invested worldwide in the JWST project.

The European Astronomical Society wishes to publicly express the concerns of its members about the current uncertainties affecting the development of the JWST mission. They also want to convey their hope that fruitful solutions will be found to complete and launch what promises to be a world leading astronomical observatory.