

1 Foreword

You are opening the IERS Annual Report for 2003. At a first glance, its overall structure closely resembles the Report for 2002, but an attentive reader will find that it contains several new sections, reflecting the inevitable development and modernization of the Service.

First of all, the International DORIS Service (IDS) was approved, after several years of testing, by the IAG as its full service at the IUGG General Assembly (Sapporo, August 2003). Consequently, it became the fourth Technique Centre of the IERS. I would like to use this occasion for welcoming most heartily this new component of the IERS, and express my conviction that it will contribute substantially to improve the IERS products. The report of IDS is to be found in Section 3.4.4.

Secondly, the family of Combination Research Centres grew by a new member. Agenzia Spaziale Italiana – Centro di Geodesia Spaziale is enriching the research component of the IERS since 2003, thus raising the number of CRCs to eleven (see Section 3.6.2.1 for their report).

Future activities of the IERS, reflecting the new challenges posed by the dramatic increase of accuracy of space geodetic observations achieved during the last years, were discussed and finally launched during two important meetings that took place in 2003:

- IERS Retreat 2003 (Paris, April 2003) led to establishing three new Working Groups (WG on Combination, WG on ITRF Datum, and WG on Site Co-location), and to starting the IERS Combination Pilot Project that should eventually lead to routinely made rigorous combination of different techniques, and to a set of mutually consistent products (for details see Section 4.1). According to the recommendation of the Retreat, the Directing Board changed the name of the IERS to *International Earth rotation and Reference systems Service*, without changing its acronym.
- IERS Workshop on site co-location surveys (Matera, October 2003) discussed the problems of precise site surveying, adjustment of local ties and networks, and other issues important for future improvements of the consistency of IERS products (Section 4.2).

This list of novelties in 2003 is far from being exhaustive – if you want to learn more about all IERS activities and products, please take the time and read the chapters that follow.

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