Press Release – Pluto to be included in Solar System Drive

Pluto will still be installed as part of The World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive despite recently being stripped of its planet status.

The outermost planet in our Solar System was demoted and reclassified to a "dwarf planet", following an assembly of the International Astronomical Union in Prague on August 24. This reclassification has put an end to years of controversy.

But Warrumbungle Shire Council's General Manager Bob Geraghty said that Pluto would still be installed as part of the drive. Council received a grant from the Federal Government in October 2005 to initiate the project.

"Pluto's status as the ninth planet in our Solar System has been contested for many years by astronomers," Mr Geraghty said.

"It will now be even more enticing for people to come and drive the Solar System and see why Pluto was reclassified, to experience the size and scale of the now 'dwarf planet', compared to Neptune for example."

The Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars and Uranus have all been installed with Pluto, and Neptune the next to follow.

Coonabarabran astronomer Fred Watson said Pluto's recent reclassification was well overdue.

"Pluto's reclassification as a dwarf planet this year was long overdue, since astronomers had known for many years that it was very different from the other planets of the Solar System," he said.

"However, it is still the best-known of the dwarf planets, and is included in the Solar System Drive for this reason. For many astronomers, Pluto's orbit marks the edge of the main part of the Solar System."

The three dimensional model planets are attached to huge billboard signs, 4 metres by 4 metres in size, and will be situated along the five major tourist drives that lead to Coonabarabran providing tourists with information on our solar system.

The planets are scaled in size and distance to the sun - which is represented by the Anglo Australian Telescope dome at Siding Spring Observatory – 38 million times smaller than outer space.

Local contractors include Coolah Fibreglass, who moulded the 3D planets ranging from 5cm to 3.9 metres in diameter, Steve Walker Signwriting completing the artwork and Newton's Mechanical Repairs Coonabarabran contracted for the design fabrication and installation of the signs.

The new tourist attraction will be supported by a strong marketing and public relations campaign with promotional brochures and souvenirs expected to be available and a website in operation in time for a launch early next year.

Similar models located in the USA and Europe are neither as large or accessible as this Australian model, nor is the centre of these Solar System models an actual world class astronomy research facility which operates an educational outreach centre.

Media Note
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