EPSC Abstracts
Vol. 8, EPSC2013-213, 2013
European Planetary Science Congress 2013

Low on the London Scale

S. Webb
University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom (stephen.x.webb@port.ac.uk)

Abstract

Until relatively recently, many authors have assumed that if extraterrestrial life is discovered it will be via the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence: we can best try to detect life by adopting the SETI approach of trying to detect beacons or artefacts. The Rio Scale, proposed by Almár and Tarter in 2000, is a tool for quantifying the potential significance for society of any such reported detection. However, improvements in technology and advances in astrobiology raise the possibility that the discovery of extraterrestrial life will instead be via the detection of atmospheric biosignatures. The London Scale, proposed by Almár in 2010, attempts to quantify the potential significance of the discovery of extraterrestrial *life* rather than extraterrestrial *intelligence*. What might be the consequences of the announcement of a discovery that ranks low on the London Scale? In other words, what might be society's reaction if 'first contact' is via the remote sensing of the byproducts of unicellular organisms rather than with the products of high intelligence? Here, I examine some possible reactions to that question; in particular, I discuss how such an announcement might affect our views of life here on Earth and of humanity's place in the universe.