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Can we hold on to a dark and quiet sky? The UK and European campaigns to rein in megaconstellations

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There could be more than a million satellites deployed in Low Earth Orbit by the mid 2030s. This is a paradigm shift in our use of space, and represents a thousandfold increase since SpaceX began the construction of the first large constellation in 2019. Such a dramatic change is already having a major impact on the science of astronomy on the ground and in space, with radio and optical interference meaning that facilities like the Rubin Observatory and the Square Kilometer Array could struggle to deliver their goals.

In this paper we will describe the problem, the wider impacts and how we have responded in our roles with the Royal Astronomical Society and European Astronomical Society, organisations representing thousands of European astronomers. Our talk will encompass our efforts to garner technical information, to understand space law, to build broader alliances, successful (and unsuccessful) lobbying efforts, and our work with the media and wider public. We will describe the outcomes of work with the Federal Communications Commission in the US, OfCom in the UK, the European Commission, the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and in the UK the relatively new Earth Space Sustainability Initiative.

Finally, we will offer some thoughts on the next steps in what is certainly a fast-moving landscape and spacescape, and how to find a balance between vocal campaigning and softer engagement with the full range of stakeholders.