

Today, the original hopes of the five founding members have not only become reality but — as new Member States have joined over the years — ESO has fully taken up the challenge of its mission to design, build and operate the most powerful ground-based observing facilities on the planet.

On the Chajnantor Plateau in northern Chile, together with international partners, ESO is developing and operating the biggest ground-based astronomical project in existence, the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA). And ESO is preparing to build the world's biggest eye on the sky, the European Extremely Large Telescope. Constantly at the technological forefront, ESO is ready to tackle new and as yet unimaginable territories of scientific discovery.



6 30 November 1966
First light for the ESO 1-metre telescope at La Silla, the first telescope to be used by ESO in Chile.



7 24 August 1967
Denmark formally joins ESO (Member State 6).



8 25 March 1969
Inauguration of the ESO site at La Silla by the President of the Republic of Chile, Eduardo Frei Montalva, and of ESO's Chilean headquarters in Santiago's Vitacura district.



9 2 December 1975
The ESO Council approves Garching bei München, Germany, as the new home for ESO's Headquarters.



10 7 November 1976
First light for the ESO 3.6-metre telescope.



15 22 June 1983
First light for the MPG/ESO 2.2-metre telescope.



14 24 May 1982
Italy formally joins ESO (Member State 8).



13 1 March 1982
Switzerland formally joins ESO (Member State 7).



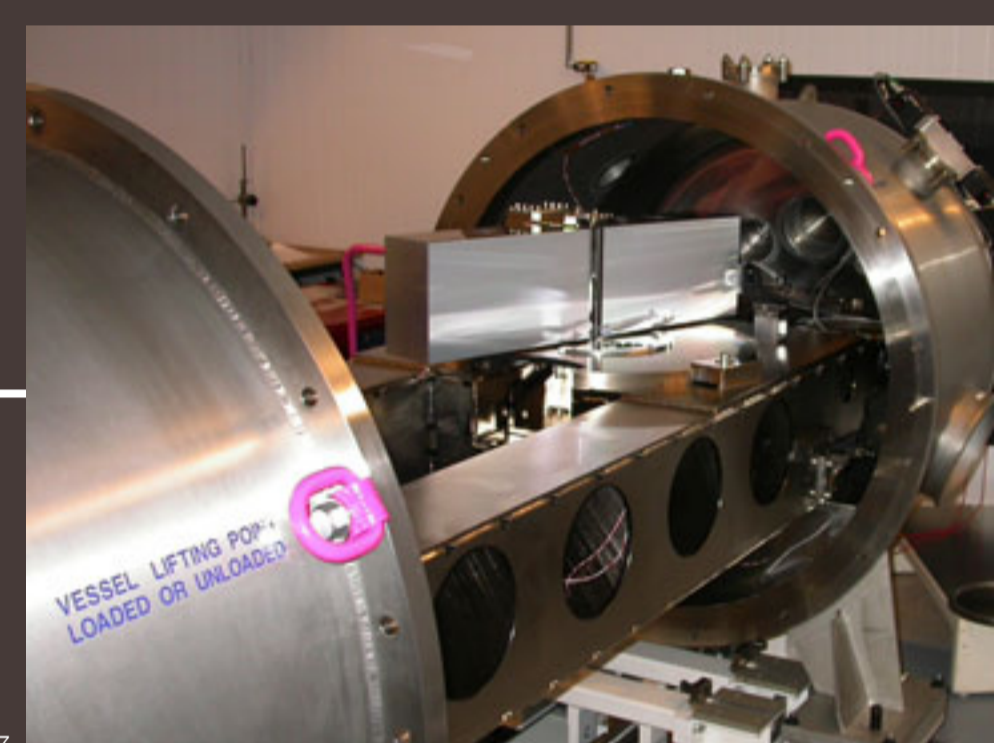
12 5 May 1981
Inauguration of the new ESO Headquarters in Garching, Germany.



11 1978
Completion of the Quick Blue Survey done with the ESO 1-metre Schmidt telescope.



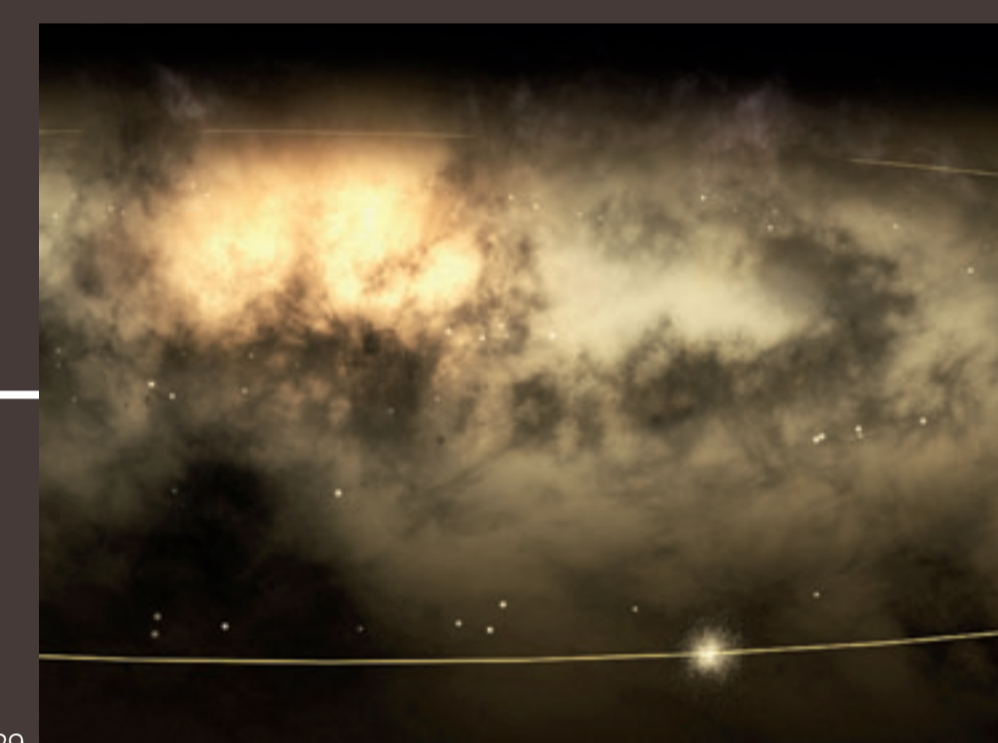
26 24 June 2002
The United Kingdom formally joins ESO (Member State 10).



27 11 February 2003
First light of the High Accuracy Radial Velocity Planet Searcher (HARPS) at ESO's 3.6-metre telescope at the La Silla Observatory.



28 25 July 2003
The Republic of Chile grants free concession of the land on Chajnantor for the execution of the ALMA project.



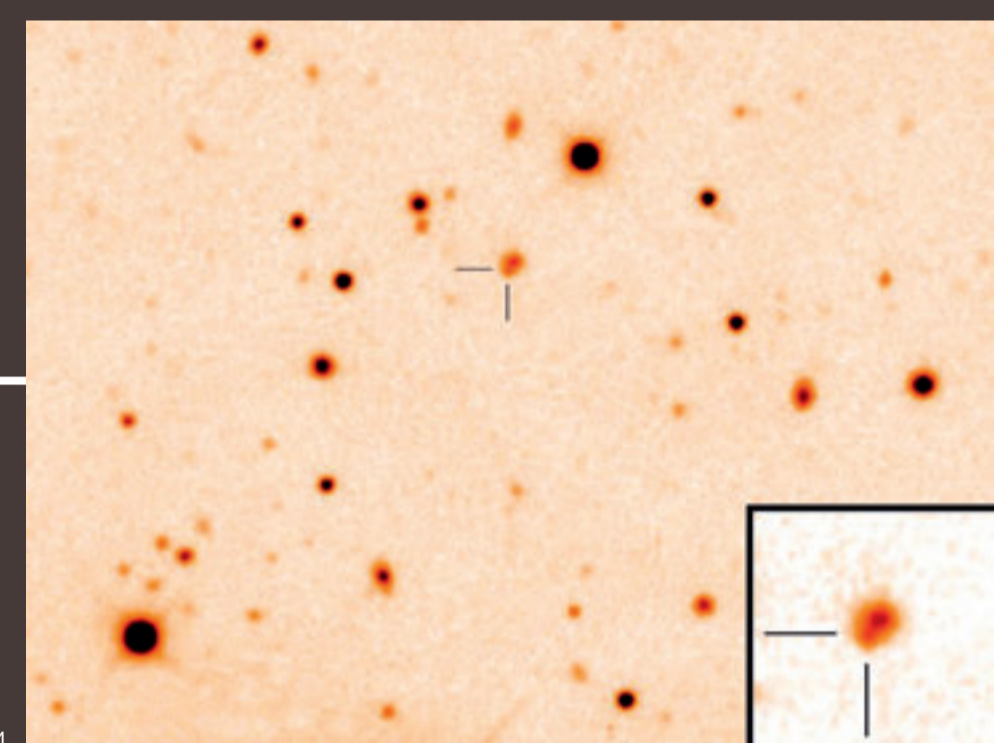
29 6 April 2004
After 15 years and more than 1000 nights of observations at La Silla, astronomers show from the motions of more than 14 000 Sun-like stars that our galaxy has led a much more turbulent life than previously assumed.



30 7 July 2004
Finland formally joins ESO (Member State 11).



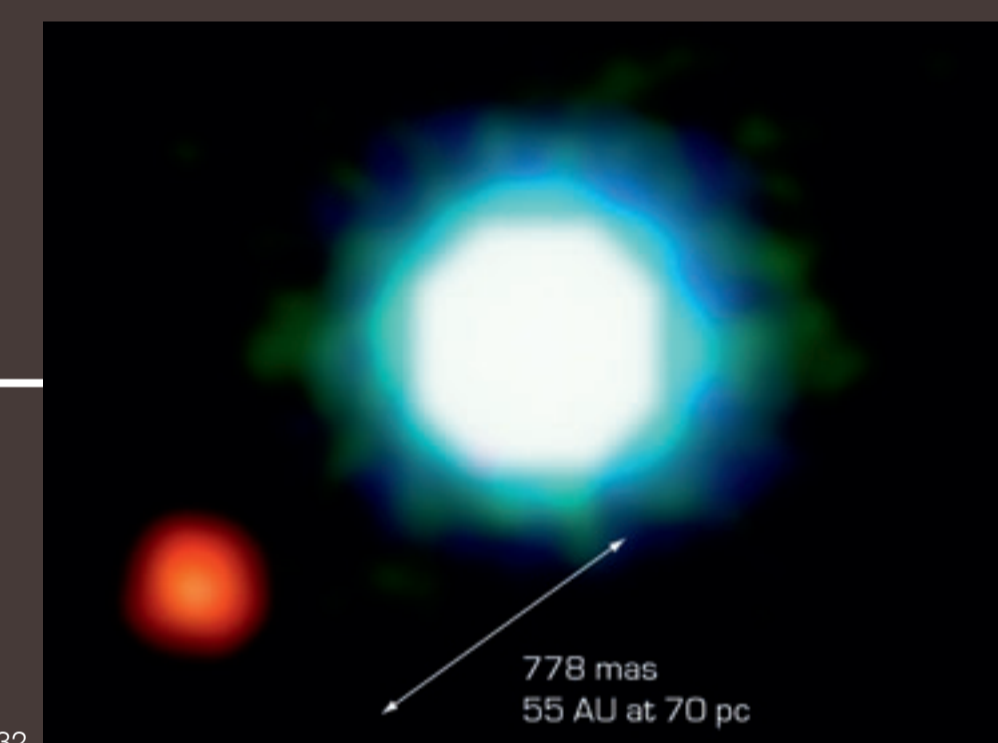
35 28 January 2006
First light of the VLT laser guide star, on the VLT's UT4, Yepun.



34 6 October 2005
ESO telescopes provide definitive proof that long gamma-ray bursts are linked with the ultimate explosions of massive stars, solving a long-standing puzzle.



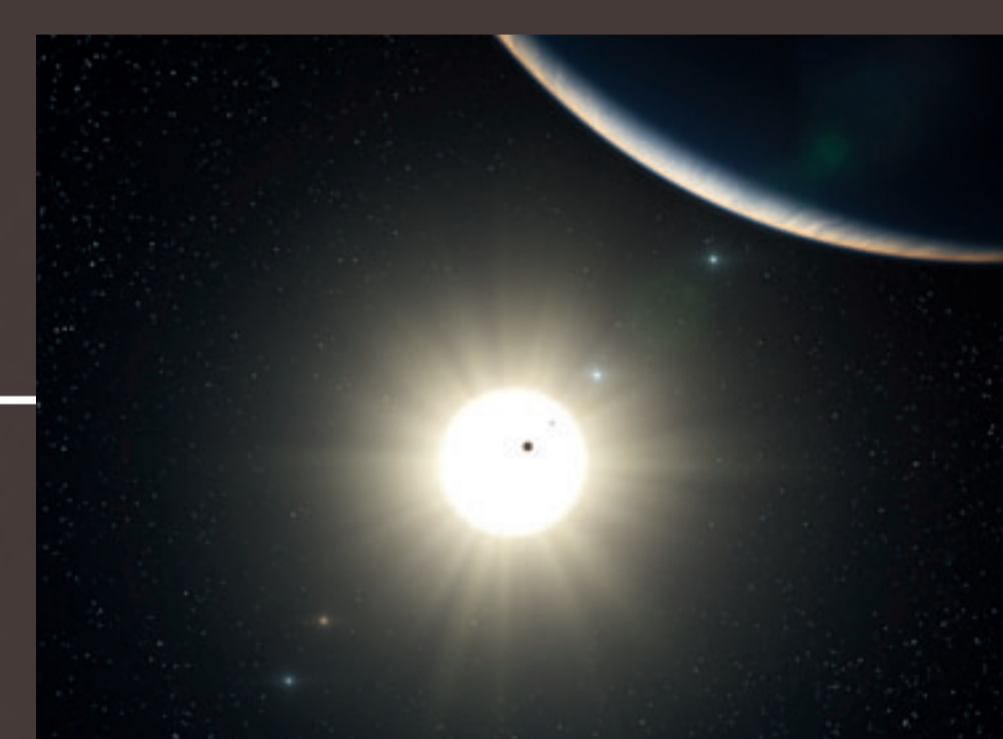
33 14 July 2005
First light for the submillimetre Atacama Pathfinder Experiment (APEX).



32 10 September 2004
The VLT obtains the first-ever image of a planet outside the Solar System.



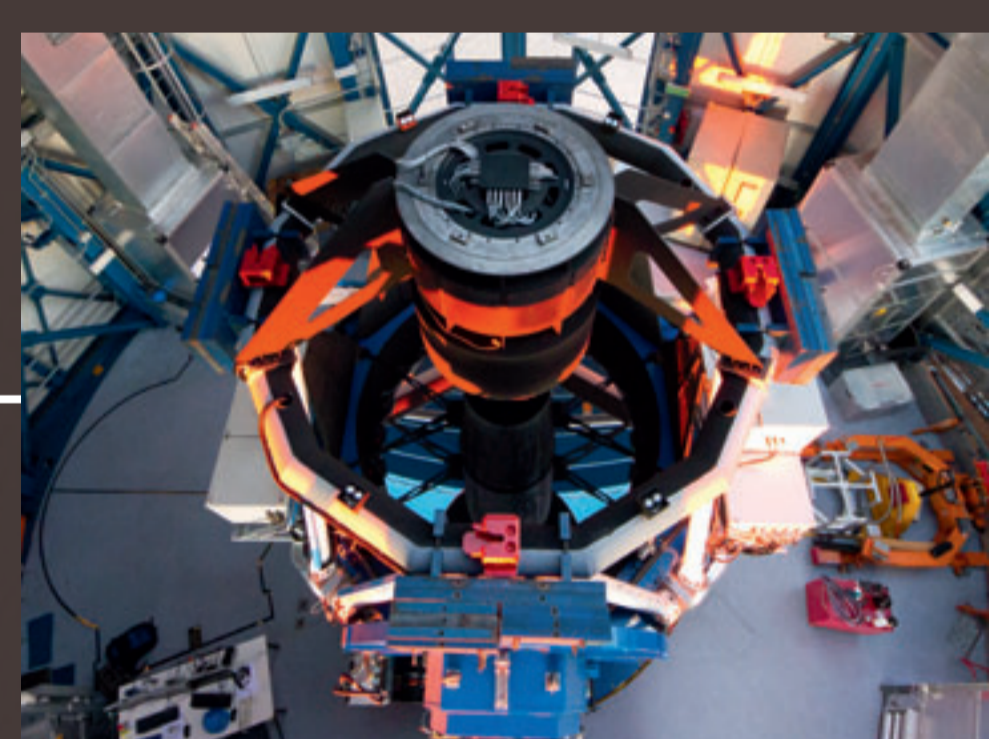
31 17 August 2004
Using the VLT, astronomers measure the age of the oldest star known in the Milky Way: 13.2 billion years old.



45 24 August 2010
Astronomers using HARPS discover the richest planetary system so far, containing at least five planets around the Sun-like star HD 10180.



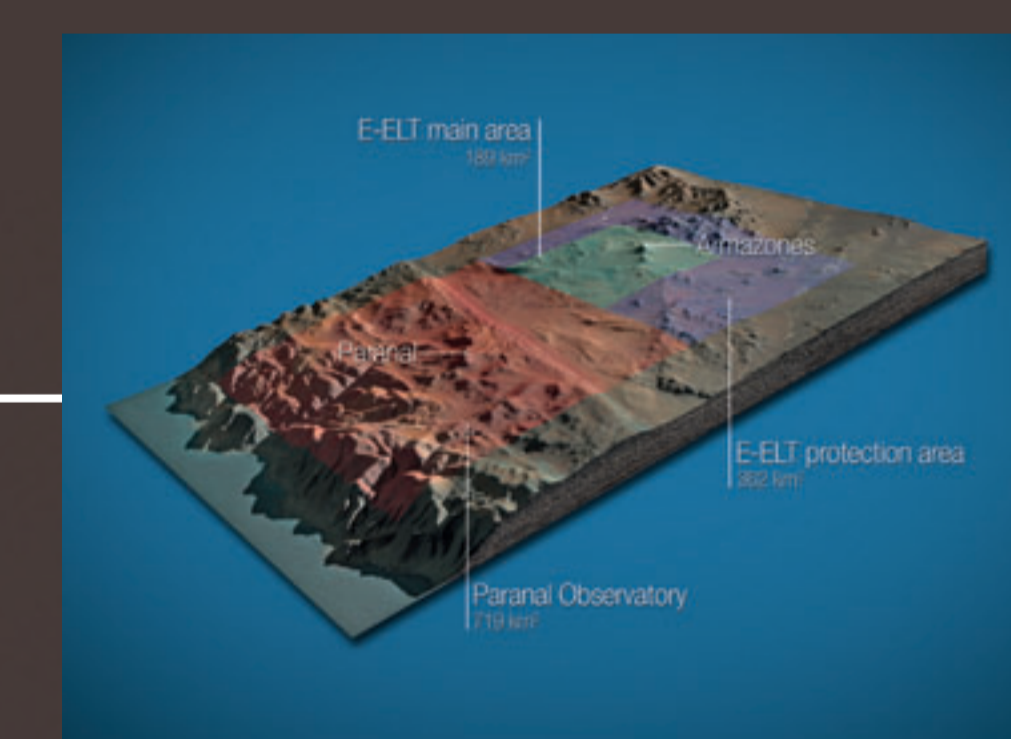
47 29 December 2010
Brazil signs the Accession Agreement to become a member of ESO.



46 8 June 2011
First images from the VLT Survey Telescope.



48 30 September 2011
ALMA starts Early Science and the first image is published.



50 13 October 2011
ESO and Chile sign an agreement on the land for the E-ELT.

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