



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **the Premier and Cabinet**

Minister for Science and Innovation

Media Statement

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

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Liberal-National Government pushes forward with bid to win massive international observatory.

Multiple announcements today by Science and Innovation Minister Troy Buswell demonstrated the Liberal-National Government's strong commitment to maintaining Western Australia's bid to secure the internationally significant Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio-astronomy project.

Mr Buswell said that since coming to office in late September, the Liberal-National Government had progressed matters to a new level and positioned the State very favourably in the race against southern Africa to be chosen as home to the \$2.5 billion project.

He announced that:

- funding approval has been given for \$4 million for the purchase of Boolardy Station, 300 kilometres north-east of Geraldton to house the massive facility
- The Office of Native Title has been authorised to pursue its role as lead negotiator in the establishment of a Boolardy land use agreement
- negotiations have been completed with the University of WA and Curtin University of Technology to jointly establish an International Radio Astronomy Research Centre (IRARC) in Perth with a branch at Geraldton.

The SKA plan is for a revolutionary next-generation radio telescope 50-100 times more sensitive than present day instruments. It will involve an array of several thousand receiver dishes with a collecting area of one million square metres.

The revolutionary project is being developed by scientists from 50 institutions across 19 countries for construction over the period 2012-20 at a projected cost of around \$2.5 billion. It will be globally linked and have 10,000 times the capacity of current radio telescopes to make discoveries.

Australia and southern Africa have been identified as the most likely suitable sites for the project, with WA's Murchison region standing out as an ideal location because of its rare and exceptional radio quietness.

A strategy to enhance WA's claim to the project has been developed in collaboration with the Federal Government and Australia's premier science agency, the CSIRO. It aims to build Australia's expertise in the radio astronomy field and to have a site and the necessary support arrangements planned and ready.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government is funding the construction of the new Pathfinder telescope in the Murchison. Pathfinder will be one of the world's foremost radio telescopes and an important test-bed for SKA technology.

Boolardy Station

If WA wins the SKA project, Boolardy homestead will become base for the accommodation and support facilities serving a giant SKA observatory 40 kilometres away on the historic 350,000 hectare pastoral lease.

The Minister said securing Boolardy was an important step, demonstrating that Australia was organised and could offer a superb core site that was managed and protected.

International Radio Astronomy Research Centre

IRARC will be an equal joint venture between UWA and Curtin with its administrative office at UWA and research being conducted at both campuses. The State will contribute \$20million towards its establishment and operation.

The centre will be run by an eminent group of WA-based scientists who have played major roles in developing the concept and have expert knowledge of the SKA project.

UWA's Professor Peter Quinn, a Premier's Fellow in Astronomy has been appointed centre director, together with deputy directors Professor Steven Tingay and Professor Peter Hall, both leading radio astronomers based at Curtin and Professor Lister Staveley-Smith, also a Premier's Fellow in Astronomy at UWA.

Mr Buswell said a governing board to oversee the centre would be announced shortly. It will be chaired by former Environmental Protection Authority head Bernard Bowen.

He said it was imperative that Australia continued to develop and promote its case to host the SKA. The Commonwealth had spent \$118million and the State more than \$29million so far on leading edge R&D and radio astronomy related activities demonstrating Australia's prime candidacy.

"The potential benefits, in terms of investment, jobs and science capability, are huge," he said.

"This Government will do everything it possibly can to make WA home to this exciting international facility."

The Minister has written to the Federal Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Minister Kim Carr informing him of WA's latest actions and confirming the new Liberal-National Government was committed to helping win the SKA.

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