



Gerry Brownlee

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Aus & NZ Join in Mega Science Bid

The Australian and New Zealand governments have agreed to join forces to bid for the A\$2.5 billion (NZ\$3.1 billion) international Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project.

The formal arrangement will be signed by New Zealand's Economic Development Minister Gerry Brownlee and the Australian Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, at the Australia-New Zealand Leadership Forum in Sydney this morning.

The SKA is a large-scale, new-generation radio-telescope that will be by far the most powerful of its type in the world, with a discovery potential 10,000 times greater than current instruments.

The SKA will see up to four thousand antennas spread over a five thousand kilometre baseline to create a single deep space listening device.

The telescope – able to see back to the formation of the first stars – is one of the world's most significant mega-science projects – on a par with the Large Hadron Collider in Europe. Australia and New Zealand are one of the two shortlisted sites – the other is in Southern Africa.

"The SKA project promises to be a top global science project of the 21st century, using one of the world's most powerful computers, to explore fundamental questions in science," Mr Brownlee said.

"Extending the configuration of the SKA to include New Zealand will significantly add to the scientific outcomes of the project and could possibly see two stations constructed in New Zealand with an array of radio telescopes," said Mr Brownlee.

The agreement follows discussions on the SKA between Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers over the past 12 months. It commits both countries to supporting SKA-related industry opportunities and promoting their industry capabilities internationally as part of this process.

Senator Carr said: "New Zealand's participation will strengthen the bid to host the SKA, one of the world's great science projects, making the bid truly international.

"New Zealand is crucial to building the global collaboration required for the SKA to reach its full potential.

"If our bid is successful, the SKA will not only significantly increase Australia's and New Zealand's scientific capabilities; it will result in economic benefits and spinoffs in a number of areas, including supercomputing, data transmission, renewable energy, construction and manufacturing," Senator Carr said.

"From New Zealand's point of view this agreement will also be a stepping stone to foster strong links and cooperation between Australian and New Zealand industry, particularly in the high-technology sectors," Mr Brownlee said.

Final decisions on the SKA, including the host site, are not expected until 2012, with construction expected to run for six to eight years. The project currently involves a total of 19 countries.

For more information, including pictures and animations, visit www.ska.gov.au or