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ASKAP construction on track

1 February 2010: Construction of CSIRO's Australian Square Kilometre Array Pathfinder (ASKAP) radio telescope has begun in Western Australia.

From http://www.atnf.csiro.au/projects/askap/news_antenna_01012010.html

The first of 36 identical 12-metre antennas that will make up the ASKAP telescope is currently being assembled and will shortly undergo rigorous testing at the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory in the Mid West region of Western Australia.

In coming weeks comprehensive site acceptance testing of the antenna will be completed. Additional CSIRO-made components, including feeds, receivers and data processing systems, will also be installed on the antenna's structure.

The antenna has been designed and built by the 54th Research Institute of China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (known as CETC54). CSIRO awarded the contract for the design and construction of ASKAP's 36 antennas to CETC54 in November 2008 after an international tendering process. Local contractors also assisted the team.

Construction of ASKAP's next five antennas will proceed quickly. The first six antennas are due to be operational by 2011 and the complete ASKAP system is expected to be completed by 2013.

Once built, ASKAP will operate as part of CSIRO's radio-astronomy facility for use by Australian and international scientists. It will allow astronomers to answer questions about cosmic magnetism, and the evolution and formation of galaxies, and to assist in the discovery of pulsars and possibly gravitational waves.

As well as being a world-leading telescope in its own right, ASKAP will be an important test-bed for the Square Kilometre Array, a future international radio telescope that will be the world's largest and most sensitive.

Photo: Assembly of the first ASKAP antenna by the CSIRO and CETC54 team has made rapid progress. Credit: Carole Jackson, CSIRO.