



## **Conclusions from the SKA Board Meeting on March 19<sup>th</sup>**

### Preamble

- The Board notes that the process to determine the location for the SKA is critical to the global project, building on the recent success of establishing the SKA Organisation, and enabling a step change in the pace of the project in moving through the detailed design phase to construction readiness.
- The Board is committed to ensuring that the Members of the SKA Organisation are equipped with the appropriate information to decide on the site for the SKA and that the process can be undertaken in a transparent and defensible manner.
- The Board thanks the SSG and SSAC, and the candidate sites, for the significant effort they have applied to the evaluation, leading to the delivery of a detailed and comprehensive report, on the agreed schedule.
- The board wishes to maintain the next steps in the previously foreseen process of site selection.
- The Articles of Association for the SKA Organisation specify that the SSAC report will be passed to the Members in preparation for a decision on the site, 'as soon as reasonably practicable' along with a commentary from the Board. The Board agrees that there is now sufficient consensus on transmitting the report and recommendation to the members along with the commentary below, and convening a meeting of the Members of the SKA organisation for the purpose of considering the recommendation and the commentary.
- The Board appreciates the willingness of all parties to move forward constructively as the report and recommendation is passed to the Members and the process moves to the next stage.

### Commentary

- The report from the SSAC presents a detailed analysis of the merits of the two candidate sites against the agreed selection factors. The Board welcomes the overall conclusion that both the candidate sites would be well suited to host the SKA and notes that this is the result of the level of effort and commitment to the project evident in both candidate site regions. It further notes that this conclusion is an essential component, irrespective of the ultimate decision, of realising the project.
- The Board notes the detailed work done by the SSAC in assessing the strengths of each candidate site over the full range of assessment factors and commends this input to the members.
- Board members, following their initial review of the SSAC report and recommendation, have now had the opportunity to discuss points of clarification directly with representatives of the SSAC and the SSG. The Board recognises that the detailed commentary and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative strengths and



weaknesses, provided by the SSAC in their report, augmented by the clarifying remarks received at the most recent meeting, provides a comprehensive starting point for the steps leading to a decision on the site.

- The Board has noted, in particular, the statements on the process made by representatives of the two candidate sites and the responses and explanations from the SSAC Chairman in response.
- The Board recognises that in certain areas there are questions about the treatment of data that remain unresolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Nonetheless, the Board has agreed that it does not wish to commission the SSAC to re-open or re-evaluate the input data and does not wish to restart the SSAC process. In passing the recommendations to the Members, the Board wishes to note that:
  - The SSAC report and input from the expert panel on Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) both conclude that there are negligible differences between the two candidate core sites, both being excellent. However they differ in their conclusions reached concerning the RFI environment of remote sites, and the SSAC conclusions are based on a desktop assessment using transmitter databases rather than measurements.
  - The SSAC chair presented a new analysis of what the scoring outcome would be if RFI factors were set exactly equal between the two sites. The Board noted that the resulting outcome would still favour South Africa but with a reduced significance of 9.85 to 10.15.
  - While the SSAC note the possible advantages of certain design choices suggested within the South African submission concerning siting of the Science Data Processor, it felt it was outside the scope of its remit to consider the feasibility of such design options in Australia.
  - Similarly, there were a number of questions about the impact of the array configuration choice, but it was not within SSAC's remit to consider alternative configurations.
- The Board encourages the Members to consider how to best address these areas of concern and any remaining issues.
- It encourages the Members to consider scenarios that maximise scientific return from the investment made by both candidate sites, while also delivering what is best for the project.
- The Board does not wish to make either the SSAC report or the above commentary public at this point.

The Board notes that the members meeting on 3 April 2012 will consider the recommendation and the commentary from the board, but is not expected to make a decision – rather it will be the start of a process.