



Government committed to radio astronomy project

State buys land for SKA

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THE State Government is committed to WA's bid for one of the biggest international science projects in the world, the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio astronomy project, Science Minister Troy Buswell said this week.

The Minister announced several developments relating to the SKA, including funding of more than \$4 million to buy the Boolardy Station in the Murchison, 300 kilometres north-east of Geraldton, where the project will be built if Australia is chosen to provide it.

Federal Labor Senator Mark Bishop, a long-standing advocate for the SKA and the State's bid for it, welcomed the announcement.

"The purchase of land is a necessary step forward for the SKA project," he said.

"With the land secured on a preferred site, CSIRO will be able to start construction on the next generation radio telescope."

Liberal member for the Agricultural region, Brian Ellis, has followed the progress of SKA developments in the Mid West and said winning the project could only create positive outcomes for Geraldton.

"The Government has shown great faith in the project with this investment; securing the site is a great outcome for the Mid West," Mr Ellis said.

"If we get this project it will bring great scientists to the Mid West to study here; it will put Geraldton on the map. It's a great long term investment for WA."

A world-class radio astronomy centre will be

built in Geraldton to complement the SKA, which will receive a \$20 million contribution from the State Government.

The Office of Native Title will be the lead negotiator in the establishment of a Boolardy land use agreement.

Australia is in the running against South Africa to secure the \$2.5 billion SKA project. SKA international project director Richard Schilizzi, said early 2012 was the due date for site selection.

Parliament voted for the SKA project earlier this month. A spokesperson from the Parliament public works committee said once Native Title agreements had been worked out construction work on the site could begin. Native Title approvals are expected to be complete in early March 2009.

Mr Buswell said Australia needed to develop and promote its case to host the SKA, which he said would lead to huge investments in the region as well as jobs and scientific development.

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

"The Commonwealth has spent \$118 million and the State more than \$29 million so far on radio astronomy-related activities that demonstrated Australia's case to host the SKA."

The Shire of Murchison has no township and its radio quietness makes it an ideal location for the SKA which will be 50-100 times more sensitive than any other modern day instruments.