

## €1,5bn SKA project still immune to global crisis

By: Keith Campbell

Published: 12 Feb 09



The current global economic crisis is unlikely to affect the development of the giant, international, Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope project.

"It's very hard to predict, but we have seen no sign of it," assures SKA South Africa project director Dr **Bernie Fanaroff**.

The SKA is a €1,5-billion project to build the world's biggest radio telescope, which will be situated in either South Africa's Northern Cape province (with outstations elsewhere in the country and spread across eight other African countries) or in Australia (with, possibly, outstations in New Zealand).

"We did ask that question (regarding the effect of the global crisis on the SKA) at the last meeting of the funding agencies, in Washington, in November," he reports, "and the

general feeling was that there wouldn't be any direct impact."

The decision on where to site the SKA will not be taken until 2011, and the instrument will only achieve initial operating capability in 2016 at the earliest and will be fully ready for operation only by 2021.

It is expected that the SKA will be funded 40% by European countries (namely France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK), 40% by the US, and 20% by the rest of members of the international consortium, which currently are: Australia, Canada, China, India, and South Africa.

However, the SKA consortium is growing in size, with South Korea and New Zealand expressing interest in joining.

Because of different budgeting cycles, and because the funding is not needed all at once, the European countries are likely to provide most of the funds at the start of construction and the US to provide most at the end.

South Africa and Australia are both developing national precursor, or pathfinder, radio telescopes for the SKA, the South African instrument being named the MeerKAT.

South Africa hopes that construction of the some R1-billion MeerKAT and the locally funded development of technologies for the SKA will be accepted as this country's contribution to the costs of the SKA.