

# DST boosts SKA bid

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By [Audra Mahlong](#), Journalist  
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Investments in satellite and telescope projects would be boosted in a bid to host the SKA, says science and technology minister Naledi Pandor.

Government has announced five new research chairs at universities dedicated to improving the country's bid to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project.

The chairs will form part of the South African Research Chairs Initiative, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Foundation.

The posts will be awarded for a period of 15 years, subject to review every five years, and are worth a total of R240 million over this period.

The chairs have been made available to the universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Western Cape, Stellenbosch and Rhodes. The DST says this forms part of the country's commitment to strengthen science and engineering, and to improve its bid to host the SKA project.

SA is in a race with Australia to host the 1.5 billion-euro SKA radio telescope. The SKA is a mega telescope, about 100 times more sensitive than the biggest existing radio telescope.

It will consist of approximately 3 000 dish-shaped antennae and other hybrid receiving technologies, with a core of about 2 000 antennas and outlying stations of 30 to 40 antennas each, spiralling out of the core. These stations will be spread over a vast area of up to 3 000km.

Botswana, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and Namibia are to host remote SKA stations, the central location for which will be Carnarvon, in the Northern Cape.

Science and technology minister Naledi Pandor previously stated SA would increase its venture in satellite and telescope projects, and investments in high-speed communications bandwidth in a bid to host the SKA.

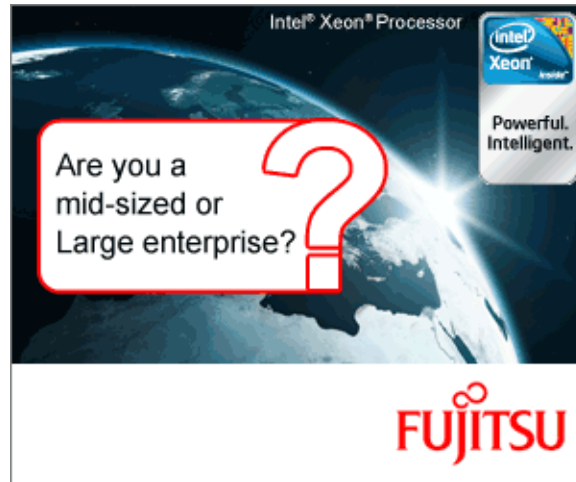
The final decision regarding the successful host country is expected in 2012. Work on the SKA is due to start in 2013, subject to successful funding proposals. It will be constructed in a phased manner, over seven years. Operations will start in 2015, provided a significant portion of the array has been commissioned.

SA has spent R258 million since 2003 on securing the project. The DST said R23 million was spent on universities, while R155 million had been spent building roads to the site. Another R11.5 million was spent on building accommodation.

The DST says research areas will include observational radio astronomy, radio astronomy instrumentation, digital signal processing, distributed data processing and RF broadband feeds, receivers and cryogenic packages.

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