

South Africa confident on super-telescope bid ahead of talks

March 29 2012



An artist impression released by the SPDO show dishes of the future Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope by night. South African science minister Naledi Pandor said Thursday she remains confident on her country's bid to host the world's most powerful radio telescope, ahead of a crucial meeting next week.

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Scientists hope the [Square Kilometre Array](#), or SKA, will shed new light on fundamental questions about the universe, including how it began, why it is expanding and whether it contains life beyond our planet.

A decision on whether South Africa or Australia will host the \$2 billion SKA had been expected next week, but the international consortium behind the project is now expected to debate a while longer.

"We have always been confident of the scientific and technical strength of our bid," Pandor said in a statement.

"Nonetheless, we recognise the importance of inclusivity and the imperative of ensuring all members of the SKA Organisation are part of discussions."

"Africa is ready to host the SKA and wants to do so. We are entirely committed to the success of the SKA and believe that it is best achieved in Africa," she added.

The SKA [board of directors](#) agreed last week to recommend a site to the full membership of the international consortium financing the scheme.

The members are set to meet on April 3 in Amsterdam, but are expected to debate the recommendation without making a final decision.

If South Africa wins the bidding, engineers will connect antennas in the arid Karoo region by remote link to a network of [dishes](#) stretching across southern and eastern Africa and as far away as Ghana.

The new instrument will be 50 to 100 times more sensitive than today's most powerful [radio telescopes](#).

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