

Aussie paper's SKA bid reports denied

According to IOL, SA's two representatives on the SKA Organisation's international board of directors both say they know nothing about a leading Australian newspaper's claim that negotiations with the preferred bidder for hosting the giant Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope are already under way, dismissing it as "speculation".

However, tensions are rising ahead of the scheduled board meeting on April 4, where a decision regarding hosting bids tabled by SA and its eight African partners, and by the Australia/ New Zealand partnership may be taken.

Senator Chris Evans, Australia's minister for science and research, will lead a high-level delegation to China and Italy next weekend as the Australians up the ante to counter what they apparently believe is political sympathy for the African bid and promote the Australasian bid. Evans will also visit the UK and the Netherlands early next month, just weeks before the first vote on the site. The four countries he's targeting - China, Italy, the UK and the Netherlands - are all founder members of the SKA Organisation and will effectively make the site decision between them.

"Australia and New Zealand are in a neck-and-neck race with South Africa..." *Sydney Morning Herald* report said. "A recommendation on the preferred site was made in confidence to the project's board of directors in London overnight. Negotiations with the preferred site are now under way, ahead of a final decision by April." The claim has been dismissed by SKA Organisation media spokesman Colin Greenwood, who told the Cape Argus: "I can confirm that the report to which you refer is speculation as no official announcement has been made. I can also confirm that the board of directors did not meet last night."

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