

International panel thumbs-up for SA radio telescope

Engineering News reports that the MeerKAT radio telescope, a precursor to the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), had a successful first test, with an international panel of experts declaring that the MeerKAT has passed its preliminary design review (PDR) with distinction.



The MeerKAT is a world-class radio telescope designed to do ground-breaking science. It will be the largest and most sensitive radio telescope in the southern hemisphere until the completion of the SKA in 2024.

With its 64 offset dishes, each 13.5 m in diameter, the MeerKAT will be one of the largest, most sensitive radio telescopes in the world, SKA South Africa project director Dr Bernie Fanaroff said, adding that "[t]he (preliminary design review) has confirmed that the MeerKAT will be among the most competitive telescopes in the world." Speaking to Engineering News, Fanaroff said that the MeerKAT "will provide African and international scientists and engineers with a cutting-edge instrument for revolutionary science and technology. It has already strengthened the African bid, led by South Africa, to host the SKA."

The PDR was carried out in Cape Town by a panel consisting of radio astronomers from India, the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Chile and Australia. The panel noted that the South African team working on the MeerKAT is capable, skilled, enthusiastic and committed to the project. The panel commended the project team for the intelligent approach towards systems engineering. It highlighted in particular the thorough approach towards the design of the infrastructure for the telescope. Close to 100 young scientists and engineers are working on the MeerKAT project.

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