

Media Release

Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture



Thursday, 8 April 2021

DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD CLASS UNDERGROUND LAB ON TRACK

The Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory (SUPL) is on track to become the first lab in the southern hemisphere to conduct research into 'dark matter', thanks to support from the Andrews Labor Government.

Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas today toured the site within the Stawell Gold Mine as she announced the project's head contractor and the start of works.

Minister Thomas was joined by key representatives including University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor, Professor Duncan Maskell and Centre of Dark Matter Particle Physics Director Elisabetta Barberio.

The laboratory will showcase Victoria's commitment to cutting-edge research as a globally significant particle physics laboratory, while also importantly boosting the local economy through the creation of 79 full time equivalent direct and indirect jobs over the first 10 years of operation. Ballarat contractor, H.Troon, has been appointed to lead construction of the laboratory. The build is set to create 42 full time equivalent roles and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Dark matter comprises 85 per cent of the mass of the universe, but until now scientists have not seen it and the substance remains a mystery. Australian and international researchers will work together inside the lab, which will be built one kilometre below ground. The rock will act as a shield from naturally occurring particles from space, making this sensitive search for dark matter possible.

Australian scientists hope to start experiments to detect dark matter as early as this year, with the initial construction of experiments underway.

The Labor Government and Commonwealth Government have both invested \$5 million towards the project.

The Victorian Government's investment has been provided through the *Regional Infrastructure Fund* which is part of the flagship *Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund*. The Fund is key to the Government's \$8 billion investment across regional and rural Victoria unveiled in the Victorian Budget 2020/21.

Quote attributable to Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas

"This important project will showcase to the world our state's commitment to cutting-edge research and put Stawell on the global map, as well as creating more jobs in regional Victoria."

Quote attributable to Member for Western Victoria Jaala Pulford

"Our support for innovative projects such as SUPL demonstrates our continued commitment to making regional Victoria a better place to live, work and invest."

Quote attributable to University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor, Professor Duncan Maskell

"Dark matter holds galaxies together. If we understand it, we will understand how the universe evolved from the Big Bang to now, and how it might continue to evolve."