

Media Release

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



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DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD CLASS UNDERGROUND LAB ON TRACK

The much-anticipated 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 Victorian Government.

Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas today took a tour of the site within the Stawell Gold Mine as she announced the project's head contractor and the start of works. She was joined by key representatives leading SUPL including University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor, Professor Duncan Maskell and Centre of Dark Matter Particle Physics Director Elisabetta Barberio.

The laboratory will showcase to the world 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 jobs over the next 10 years.

Head contractor, H.Troon has been appointed to lead construction of the cutting-edge laboratory. The build is set to create 42 full time equivalent roles and is expected to be completed by the end of the year, with scientists working in the lab from early next 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. This means laboratories like SUPL are all the more important as it will help solve questions that have the potential to change our understanding of the universe.

Australian and international researchers will work together to help solve these mysteries from inside the lab to be built one kilometre below ground. The rock will act to shield the research 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 this year, with the initial construction of experiments underway.

The multi-disciplinary work will involve scientists from research partners including the University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology, the University of Adelaide, the Australian National University, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, and the Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics.

The Victorian Government has invested \$5 million to support the underground laboratory's construction and fit out. The Commonwealth Government has also committed \$5 million towards the project.

The Victorian Government's investment has been made possible thanks to the *Regional Infrastructure Fund* which is part of the flagship *Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund*. The *Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund* helps businesses create more jobs in regional Victoria, supports community projects and assists councils to deliver cultural initiatives of economic significance to the region.

The Fund is key to the Victorian Government's \$8 billion investment across regional and rural Victoria unveiled in the Victorian Budget 2020/21 to support communities to come back stronger than ever.

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Quote attributable to Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas

“This important project is sure to put the region and our state on the global map for research and provide much needed jobs - helping to make regional Victoria a better place to live, work and invest.”

Quote attributable to Member for Western Victoria Jaala Pulford

“Investment in projects such as SUPL showcase the Victorian Government’s 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.”