**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

# FOR WRITTEN REPLY

## QUESTION NO. 2135

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**“Dr A Lotriet (DA) to ask the Minister of Science and Technology:**

**(1) Whether an implementation plan for multi-wavelength astronomy has been submitted by the National Research Foundation to her department; if not, why not; if so, (a) when was the specific plan submitted and (b) what are the further relevant details;**

**(2) whether in the budget allocation to the SA Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) has been increased as a result of the specified plan; if not, why not; if so, (a) what are the relevant details and (b) what is the status of the student programme at the SAAO in terms of being continued or discontinued?**

**NW2449E**

**REPLY:**

1. The NRF submitted the Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy to the DST in November 2015 and it was approved by the DST Executive Committee in March 2016. The Implementation Plan outlines the proposed programmatic focus and consequent financial implications for astronomy initiatives in South Africa, and it was approved as a framework within which various astronomy-related interventions, projects and programmes could be initiated, subject to the availability of funds.

The roll-out of the Plan will be jointly considered on an ongoing basis between the NRF and the DST, taking into account the available financial allocations and the level of support for astronomy within the overall DST and NRF portfolio.

(2) The Implementation Plan of the National Strategy for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy prioritises an increase in the parliamentary grant of the SAAO as the most important need for astronomy outside the MeerKAT/SKA budget. However due to the current economic conditions there has not been an increase in the current baseline allocation to the SAAO. A budget of R40 million has been allocated over the next three years from the DST Infrastructure budget, commencing from the 2016/17 financial year, for IT and infrastructure refurbishments, upgrades and new acquisitions. Although this funding will somewhat alleviate the facility’s current funding constraints and see to some basic needs of upkeep, it does not address the need for additional funding for operations and other programmes in the observatory. In this context the student programme at SAAO remains discontinued until it is feasible to increase the allocation to the SAAO for this purpose.