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Neighbourly support for Sweden's ESS bid raises funding questions in Denmark

 by Michael de Laine mdlnews@ResearchResearch.com

Danish science minister Helge Sander has high ambitions for the country's support, as announced last month, for Swedish efforts to locate the European Spallation Source (ESS) long-pulse neutron source (see cover via link below) at Lund in southern Sweden, about an hour by train from Copenhagen.

"We expect to get considerably more out of the ESS if it's located at Lund than if it's placed in Madrid or Budapest," Sander told Research Europe. "And if we're to develop the Sound region then it's important to have some facilities that can make a difference, like the ESS."

"We've decided to start negotiations with the Swedes so we can find an economic model," he added. "A negotiating team is looking at this now and we can expect an indication by the end of the year of whether we will be a full partner, a half partner or just support the installation through a contribution."

The announcement was enthusiastically welcomed in Sweden, but support in Danish research circles has been muted.

"We were very excited by the news that our Danish friends support Sweden's efforts to build the ESS," said Sander's Swedish counterpart, Lars Leijonborg. "The Swedish project has been received with a large and positive interest around Europe, but there are also other countries that want to host the facility. The decision from Copenhagen is something of a breakthrough. We are looking forward to starting discussions on how the cooperation should be organised."

Colin Carlile, director of the Swedish bid said, "ESS Scandinavia and the Swedish government's chief negotiator, Allan Larsson, are negotiating with the team designated by the Danish government on the basis of their decision. The negotiations include the issue of co-hosting."

Sander could give not give any indication of what Danish support would cost as that depends on the model chosen.

But, in moving forward, he may have to bear in mind the immediate reaction of Jens Oddershede, rector of the University of Southern Denmark and the spokesmen for the universities' interest group, Universities Denmark. The project, he cautioned, "must not lead to Danish research funding being used to finance the ESS".

Denmark's R&D spending was 2.43 per cent of GDP in 2006, according to Eurostat, below the Lisbon goal of 3 per cent. As the ESS-Scandinavia installation will cost 10-12 billion kroner (1.3-1.6bn euros) by the time it is finished in 2018, Denmark's contribution implies new money in addition to the extra spending needed to reach the 1 per cent target it has set for public R&D expenditure for 2010. The 2008 figure is expected to be 0.85 per cent of GDP.

So, if Denmark is to participate in the project, Sander will need to start making political deals to raise the new money needed to make this happen.

On this site 'Europe could choose ESS site by December' - p.1.

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