



Press Release: Construction and Installation begins

The installation of 24 three-dimensional planets has begun as work on The World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive – a project designed to boost Regional NSW's tourism industry – hits full throttle.

The project, which involves the creation of five virtual solar system drives along the five main roads that lead to Coonabarabran, was an idea hatched by local astronomer John Shobbrook a decade ago and came to fruition last year following a successful grant of \$418,365 under the Federal Government's AusIndustry Australian Tourism Development Program.

Three-dimensional planet fibreglass models have been created by Coolah Fibreglass during the past six months and are currently being fixed to large billboard signs - up to 4 metres by 4 metres in size. Local signwriter Steve Walker created the artwork for the signs.

Local steel fabricator Jason Newton and his team, who were contracted by Warrumbungle Shire Council, have been busy preparing the sites for the installation of the signs and planets and it is anticipated the half-a-million dollar project is expected to be launched next year.

Warrumbungle Shire Council's General Manager Bob Geraghty said the project was moving along well ahead of the predicted timeframe. He said the Solar System Drive would aim to build and strengthen the region's tourism industry.

"With a strong marketing campaign developed by Council's Tourism and Economic Development Unit to accompany the project, the Solar System Drive will enhance existing tourism attractions, encourage visitors to the region and provide opportunities for economic flow on benefits to a large area of rural and regional NSW," Mr Geraghty said.

"The Solar System Drive will not only involve Warrumbungle Shire but eight other Local Government Areas."

The signs will be located along the road side in RTA Rest Areas or at Visitor Information Centres at 24 sites to allow cars to stop so travellers can learn about the solar system and the unique features of each planet.

The first signs to be installed include those closest to the sun, which is represented by the dome at Siding Spring Observatory that houses the Anglo-Australian Telescope. The dome will provide the central point, and planets will be located along the drives, scaled in distance and size 38 million times smaller than the real solar system.

Planets will be located both within the Warrumbungle Shire and surrounding Local Government Areas including Moree, Narrabri, Tamworth, Gunnedah, Upper Hunter, Gilgandra, Cudgegong and Dubbo.

Caption:

Mercury, located near Siding Spring Observatory, was the first of 24 planets to be installed as part of the World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive.

Media Note

For more information on this Press Release, please contact Warrumbungle Shire Council's Team Leader Economic Development and Tourism Georgie Keene on (02) 6849 2140.