

The Advertiser

New uni computer tackles big gigs

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MULTIPLY the power of the personal computer in your home study by 500, and then some, and it's only just getting close to the amount of power Aquila can generate.

The new 3.5 tonne supercomputer at the University of Adelaide is so powerful it has the potential to help find a cure for cancer or uncover the secrets of the universe. Its regular tasks will include predictions of bushfire behaviour, climate modelling and management of water resources and salinity.

The Aquila package was put together by the South Australian Partnership for Advanced Computing, a joint venture between the state's three universities, Silicon Graphics and Intel.

SAPAC's business manager, Craig Hill, said it was difficult to compare the power of the computer with that of personal computers.

"The supercomputer and normal PCs are really like chalk and cheese," he said.

"These are the sorts of machines that will eventually be used to find cures for cancer and to find the origins of the universe. That's some pretty big science."

SAPAC director Professor Tony Williams said the computer would boost the state's research capabilities to an unprecedented level.

"This is a very exciting time for the state, our universities, industries and researchers," he said.

Aquila – an Altix 3000 "supercluster" designed and supplied by Silicon Graphics Inc – was bought with a State Government grant of \$1.035 million.

It has 160 processors and a 160GB memory. It is 4m wide, 1.8m tall and 1.5m deep.

Aquila is being housed at the University of Adelaide in a new room next to an IBM supercomputer.

Science and Information Economy Minister Trish White said the supercomputer would help South Australians tackle some of the world's biggest problems.

"This is a leap forward in our capabilities and it will join us truly with the rest of the world, to make sure that we get the best benefit that we can," she said.