

State-funded solar project cutting edge

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THE solar power industry appears to be gathering momentum in Western Australia, with the state government funding the first solar power station connected to the grid and several major solar projects being investigated for feasibility.

The government will contribute \$4.5 million to build a \$12.8 million, 1.77-megawatt solar power station in Kalgoorlie, the first solar power station in the country to be connected to a main grid.

The funding is from the first round of its \$36.5 million Low Emission Energy Development fund, which has also provided \$1.5 million towards developing an oil mallee harvesting machine to provide a bioenergy source.

Three other solar developments currently under investigation could dwarf that project which, if they eventuate, could add more than 360MW of solar energy.

WorleyParsons is currently investigating the feasibility of developing a 250MW solar thermal power station in WA.

Unlike solar photovoltaics, which use solar panels to convert the sun's energy into electricity, solar thermal involves an array of large, reflective parabolic dishes, which focus the sun's heat onto a thin pipe encompassing a fluid.

The heated fluid goes through a heat exchange process to create steam, which drives a turbine to create electricity.

To generate 250MW, it is estimated that the array of dishes would cover an area of roughly two square kilometers.

Burrup Fertilisers managing director Pankaj Oswal is understood to be behind plans for a \$1 billion, 100MW solar power plant in the Pilbara.

A third proposal, by a large Asian-based renewable energy developer manufacturer, is for a series of about 16 large commercial-scale solar photovoltaic power stations.

The proponents are looking to invest between \$50 million and \$100 million to develop the power stations, capable of generating about 1MW

each, distributed across the South West grid.

WA Sustainable Energy Association chief executive Dr Ray Wills believes a major barrier to the development of solar projects is the absence of a feed-in tariff in WA.

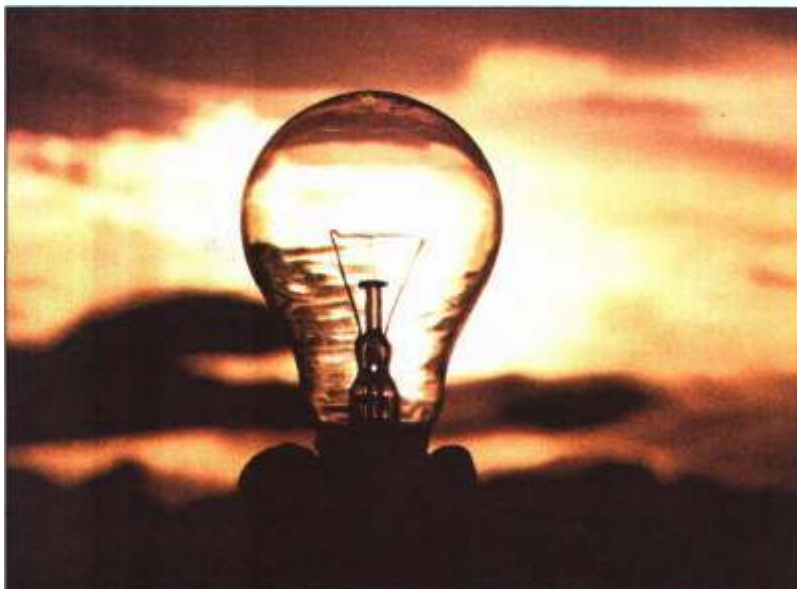
Dr Wills believes WA should follow other states, including Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, by paying business for the amount of solar energy they generate or feed back into the grid, up to a certain limit.

He said a feed-in tariff would have an immediate effect on the development of solar projects.

"While there's no carbon price on energy there's no direct incentive to start construction," Dr Wills said.

"We need to bridge the gap between when the MRET [mandatory renewable energy target] starts up and the emissions trading scheme starts up, which is a couple of years.

"Projects like [the one by the Asian-based company] continue to be stalled as long as there's not a feed-in tariff."



POWER PUSH: Several major solar power developments are being investigated for WA. *Photo: Tim van Bronswijk*