

# WA's plans for a sunshine state

Julie-anne Sprague

Victorian alternative energy company Solar Systems has won multi-million-dollar support from the West Australian government, which committed yesterday to funding almost a third of the cost of building a solar power station in Kalgoorlie.

The government's focus on diversifying the state's energy needs comes against a backdrop of a massive gas shortage in WA after an explosion at an Apache Energy facility five weeks ago.

Revealing the solar project funding at Labor's state conference yesterday, Premier Alan Carpenter said his government was focused on diversifying WA's energy needs. But he ruled out nuclear power as an option.

"There is one energy source we won't be tapping while I am Premier," he said. "No nuclear power, no nuclear waste, no uranium mining in Western Australia."

He said coal would remain an important energy source but the government had committed to buy-

ing 20 per cent of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2010.

The WA government will provide \$4.5 million of the \$12.8 million cost of establishing Solar Systems' Kalgoorlie plant, which will be the largest solar-powered project in Australia that is connected to a mainstream electricity grid.

Federal and local government funding are expected to meet the remainder of the cost. Construction is expected to begin as early as next year.

Perth-based Indian businessman Pankaj Oswal is considering building Australia's biggest solar power plant in the Pilbara in WA's north-west, which is home to Mr Oswal's Burrup fertiliser operations.

Mr Oswal is completing a pre-feasibility study on the \$1.5 billion project and is expected to decide whether to proceed later this year.

Solar Systems, which is developing a \$420 million solar project in Victoria's north-west, said the 48-dish Kalgoorlie station would generate

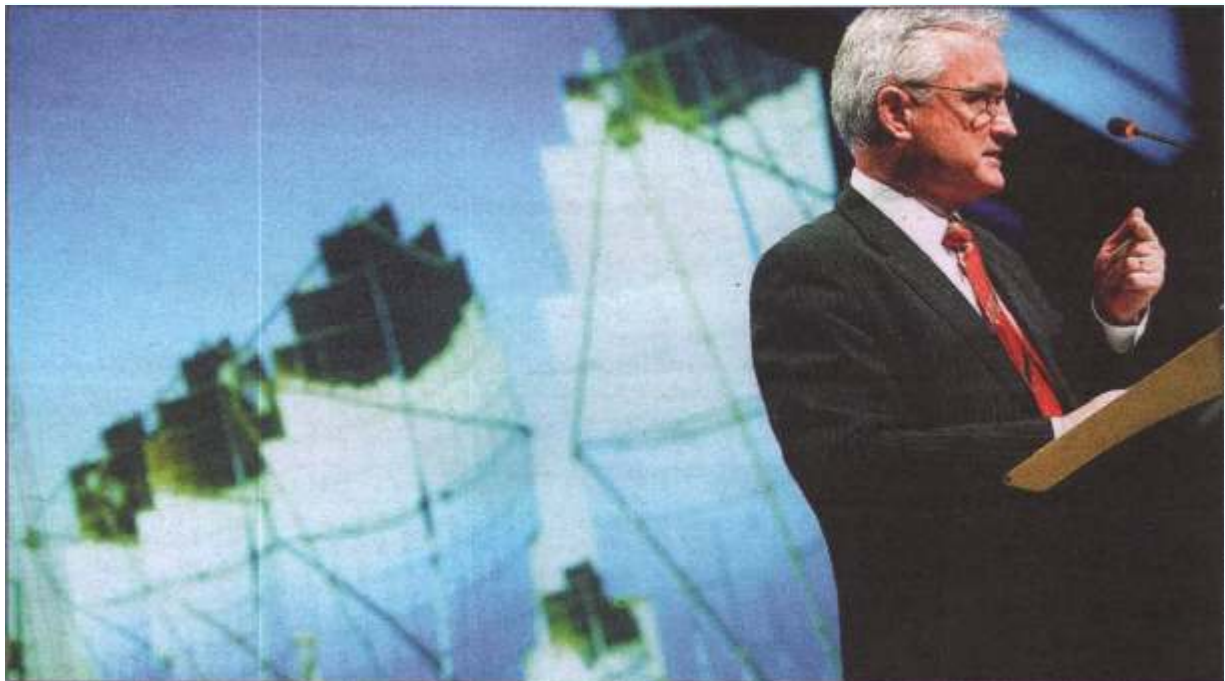
1.77 megawatts of electricity, or enough to power 500 homes.

Managing director Dave Holland said the company's solar dishes concentrated sunlight by 500 times using mirrors, and converted high-energy beams into electricity using photovoltaic cells.

The power station was selected by an independent advisory group established by the government to identify projects to share in the \$36.5 million Low Emission Energy Development fund.

Another group, Future Farm Industries Co-operative Research Centre, received \$1.5 million in the first round of funding, towards the cost of designing, building and testing an oil-mallee harvesting machine.

The University of Western Australia-based CRC is developing farming systems that aim to make agriculture more productive, sustainable and adaptable to climate change.



Mirrors of success . . . Alan Carpenter sheds light on the state's new solar scheme yesterday.

Photo: ERIN JONASSON