

## Proposed solar farms could create 2600 jobs in Queensland

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A decision will be made "in early September" between eight new large Queensland solar farms which have applied for federal government assistance and could ultimately provide 2600 new jobs.

One of the eight solar farm proposals, at Dalby, would include [400,000 solar panels to provide power for 32,000 homes](#).

Another solar farm at Kidston – west of Townsville – could potentially generate 50 per cent of Queensland's electricity needs from renewable energy by 2030.

The new large scale solar farms are proposed for Dalby, Oakey, Longreach, Hughenden, Proserpine, Collinsville and at an old gold mine at Kidston, 280 kilometres north-west of Townsville.

The Queensland Government in March 2016 championed the Genex's eventual 150 megawatt solar farm at Kidston – replacing the town's old gold mine - as "recycling" a no-longer used gold mine.

This solar plant is combined with a [hydro-electrical plant on the site, which recycles the water contained in the old mine's tailings dams](#).

"The project has the potential to meet all the peak power generation demands of North Queensland and some of Central Queensland," Queensland's energy minister [Dr Anthony Lynham said in March 2016](#).

The Queensland government has committed to a public inquiry into establishing the state's 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030.

A total of \$100 million is available for firms bidding for help under the federal government's Australian Renewable Energy Agency's large scale solar energy policy.

The plants each use other funds, in addition to the federal money, to establish the solar plants.

The Australian Conservation Council questions ARENA's long-term commitment to solar energy.

On Wednesday, Fairfax Media reported how one of Queensland's [earliest pilot solar projects at Windorah is being rapidly superceded by solar projects on a much larger scale](#).

Private firm Elecnor has begun this month construction of Queensland's largest solar plant, the 70 megawatt Barcaldine Solar Farm, supported by a \$22.8 million grant from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation has also provided \$20 million to this project.

That Barcaldine project could provide 10 per cent of Australia's electricity, from large-scale solar plants, ARENA chief executive Ivor Frischknecht said.

ARENA is also now providing \$3.7 million to get the solar farm to collect 1.7 megawatts of solar energy to provide power to accommodation and lights [around Rio Tinto's bauxite plant in Weipa](#).

[ARENA will ultimately provide over \\$11 million to let the solar farm expand to generate 6.7 megawatts of solar energy](#) to helping workers conditions and running facilities at the Weipa plant.

### **The proposed Queensland solar projects seeking ARENA help include:**

- Origin Energy Limited's 106-megawatt Darling Downs Solar Farm at Dalby
- Edify Energy and Solar Choice-sponsored Whitsunday Solar Farm, a 52.8-megawatt farm near Collinsville
- Genex Power Limited's 50-megawatt Kidston Solar Project at Kidston, south west of Townsville
- KCSF Consortium's 50 megawatt Kelsey Creek Solar Farm near Proserpine
- RATCH-Australia Corporation's 42-megawatt Collinsville Solar Power Station at Collinsville
- Canadian Solar (Australia) Pty Ltd's 25-megawatt Oakey Solar Farm at Oakey outside Toowoomba
- Canadian Solar (Australia) Pty Ltd's 15 megawatt Longreach Solar Farm, outside Longreach
- Overland Sun Farming Company's 14.2 megawatt Hughenden Sun Farm, near Hughenden.

In June Mr Frischknecht said the process of asking solar companies to bid for financial assistance from ARENA was helping to [force down the costs of providing large scale solar energy](#).

"The funding requirement for new projects fell to 43 cents per watt in the expression-of-interest phase of our funding round in November last year," Mr Frischknecht said.

"The need fell again by more than a third to an average of 28 cents per watt in the full applications," he said.

"This clearly demonstrates how quickly large-scale solar PV costs are falling supported by ARENA funding, which has resulted in rising confidence, lower finance costs and a more supportive market for power purchase agreements."

The [Australian Conservation Foundation](#) supports the push towards solar businesses and says their analysis shows Queensland's solar plants could provide 2700 jobs. However it questions whether ARENA's long-term funding is safe.

"While the government says ARENA's current \$100 million funding round is safe, not all these projects will be funded in this round. If ARENA's finance and function are stripped, it will be harder for the remaining projects to get off the ground," chief executive Kelly O'Shannassy said.

"Big solar could mean a jobs boom for the sunshine state, but the federal government's proposed cuts to ARENA's funding mean good projects might never be built."

*This story was found at: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/proposed-solar-farms-could-create-2600-jobs-in-queensland-20160825-gr1elq.html>*

