

Australia's solar power production to triple with 12 new plants to be built

BY ALLYSON HORN – ABC NEWS



The projects are expected to unlock almost \$1 billion of commercial investment.

AFP: ROBYN BECK - FILE PHOTO

The construction of 12 new solar power plants in Australia will triple the nation's large-scale solar power production, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) says.

Key points:

- Australian Renewable Energy Agency announces \$92m investment in 12 plants
- Projects expected to unlock almost \$1b of commercial investment, ARENA says
- Largest plant will be built on Queensland's Darling Downs

The federally funded agency has announced a \$92 million investment in six plants in Queensland, five in New South Wales and one at Cervantes in Western Australia.

ARENA said they would increase Australia's large-scale solar capacity from 240 megawatts to 720 megawatts, providing enough energy to power 150,000 average Australian homes.

The agency said the projects were also expected to unlock almost \$1 billion of commercial investment and boost regional Australian economies.

The largest plant will be built on Queensland's Darling Downs, and will be able to generate up to 110 megawatts of power.

Other solar locations in Queensland include Dalby, Longreach, Oakey, Kidston, Collinsville and the Whitsundays.

The five locations in New South Wales include Parkes, Manildra, Griffith, Dubbo and Glen Innes.

Queensland Energy Minister Mark Bailey said it was a momentous day.

"Today is the beginning of a new industry in Queensland, with six projects — the hefty half-dozen as I call them," he said.

"My Government promised to establish a large-scale renewable energy industry, to act on climate change while creating new jobs and diversifying our economy.

"I am proud that the largest solar farm in Australia will now be located on the Darling Downs, and that two of the three largest solar farms will be located in Queensland.

"We truly have transitioned from the Sunshine State to the Solar State.

"It means more than half-a-billion-dollars of investment coming into Queensland, it means more than 500 regional jobs, with hundreds of indirect jobs."

Mr Bailey said the projects would generate enough renewable energy to power 120,000 homes.

Four of the projects in Queensland had also secured State Government support through long-term revenue contracts.

Simon Kidston, of the Kidston Solar Project, north-west of Townsville, said construction of its 50 megawatt plant will start in February.

"We're very pleased to say that construction will be finished by 2017," he said.

"We're looking at a nine to 10 month construction window with a two-month commissioning window, so by of next year we'll have the plant in full operation and pumping clean energy into the Queensland grid.

"We're developing the Kidston Renewable Energy Hub and that's comprising a very large solar farm but integrated with a pump storage hydro project.

"The reason why that's significant is pump storage hydro acts as a very low cost and efficient battery that can store solar power."

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