

July 24, 2017

Sunshine Coast Solar Farm goes live in Australian first

The Sunshine Coast Solar Farm is now live and feeding electricity into the power grid, making Sunshine Coast Council the first local government in Australia to offset 100% of its electricity consumption with energy from a renewable source.

Mayor Mark Jamieson said the 15 megawatt (MW) solar farm at Valdora allowed council to take control of its own electricity supply, combating rising electricity costs and achieving an important sustainability milestone.

“All power consumed at all of Council’s facilities, including our administration buildings, aquatic centres, community and performance venues, as well as holiday parks, libraries, art galleries and sporting facilities, will be offset with energy from a renewable source thanks to this nation-leading project,” Mayor Jamison said.

“This is an exciting day for our region and for the residents of the Sunshine Coast.

“We are the first council in Australia to build and operate a 15MW utility scale solar farm which will deliver \$22 million in savings, after all costs, for our ratepayers over the next 30 years.

“Our solar farm is the first, and will be the largest, to connect to the electricity grid in South East Queensland. It is also the first solar farm in Australia to operate at 1500 volts DC which enables it to operate more efficiently.

“This is an impressive pioneering project and is yet another example of our Council being a national leader.

“In fact, it’s so impressive, 15 councils around Australia have already inquired about how they can follow in our footsteps.

“What’s more, is that this project has been developed and delivered solely by our Council, without any assistance from either the Federal or State governments, unlike many other solar farms being developed in Australia.

“Both the State and Federal governments talk about achieving renewable energy targets – our Council is getting on with and achieving ours – and well ahead of anyone else.

“Our vision is to be the most sustainable region in Australia – healthy, smart, creative.

“This leap forward in the clean energy sector helps our Council to deliver on that promise.”

Downer Utilities Executive Director Trevor Cohen said Downer was pleased to partner with Sunshine Coast Council on its journey towards becoming Australia’s most sustainable region.

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“Downer is looking forward to the operation and maintenance phase of this project and to continue growing our relationship with council and the local community,” Mr Cohen said.

Diamond Energy’s Managing Director Tony Sennitt said it was a great pleasure working with such a forward thinking council and to see this ground-breaking project become a reality.

“Over the past three years, Diamond Energy has supported council’s enthusiastic staff, through planning, implementation and now operation,” Mr Sennitt said.

“This project is an excellent example of how – working together – projects like this generate change in the Australian energy market.”

Energex Asset Manager Northern Steven Lynch congratulated Sunshine Coast Council for its vision and determination to deliver this clean green initiative.

“We have been very pleased to work with the Council to see this project come to reality,” Mr Lynch said.

“Energex sees Grid Scale Projects like this as a key part of our low-carbon future.

Sunshine Coast Council’s Development and Innovation Portfolio Councillor Stephen Robinson said the solar farm would further help the region transition to a clean and low carbon economy.

“Already, 40,000-plus Sunshine Coast households have rooftop solar and with our own solar farm now generating, this is equivalent to a 140MW renewable energy power station on the Sunshine Coast,” Cr Robinson said.

“At any one time during construction, up to 100 people were employed on site by the lead contractor, Downer Utilities, and 10 local companies were sub-contracted to complete on-site work – from earthworks to drilling, fencing and construction.

“I’d like to thank Downer, Energex and Diamond for delivering the project with Council and thank the community for their support during construction.

“I’d also like to acknowledge the council staff who have been passionately committed to seeing this innovative project through to completion.”

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FAST FACTS:

- The Sunshine Coast Solar Farm is the second largest in Queensland and the sixth largest Australia wide.

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- At its peak, the solar farm will generate 15,000 kilowatts of electricity, which will go straight into the Energex network.
- The electricity generated over one year will be enough to power the equivalent of 5000 homes.
- Aluminium tables held up on screw piles are used to hold the 57,000 panels above the flood plain.
- About 36,000 tree and shrub seedlings will be planted around the solar farm's boundaries - one of the largest revegetation projects to be undertaken on the Sunshine Coast.

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