



Media Release

Australia's first renewable powered mine and township

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) today announced funding for a ground-breaking two-phase project in far north Queensland that will supply renewable energy to Weipa's bauxite mine, township and port.

ARENA CEO Ivor Frischknecht said the collaborative \$23.4 million project was a first for Australia and a first for ARENA, and would demonstrate the potential for renewable energy to provide reliable and competitively priced power to remote mining operations.

"ARENA is providing \$3.5 million towards the first stage of this solar photovoltaics (PV) project, which will provide 1.7MW off-grid power to the mine, town and port facilities under a 15 year power purchase agreement with Rio Tinto Alcan," Mr Frischknecht said.

"First Solar and Ingenero will deliver ground-mounted thin-film PV to the site; a total of 18,000 solar PV panels will be installed during this first phase, contributing up to 20 per cent of daytime demand and offsetting the mining operation's reliance on diesel fuels.

"This is the first time a mining company has adopted renewable energy for its Australian operations and is the first project to be funded through the Industry arm of ARENA's Regional Australia's Renewables Program."

Mr Frischknecht said ARENA had committed up to \$7.8 million for a second phase of the Weipa project, contingent on the success of the initial phase in 2014.

"Due for completion in 2017, the second phase is intended to deliver an additional 5MW PV system; it will include a significant storage component and be capable of meeting up to 100 per cent of day-time power demand at Weipa at certain times," Mr Frischknecht said.

Mr Frischknecht said off-grid communities and businesses have had little choice but to rely on diesel generators that are expensive to run and subject to volatile fuel prices.

"Transporting fuel long distances for generators is dangerous and subject to variable weather conditions – it is a costly, unpredictable arrangement that doesn't make good economic sense," Mr Frischknecht said.

"ARENA has made it a priority to work with major mining companies to find solutions and overcome roadblocks associated with integrating renewable energy into off-grid locations.

"The information and data generated by this project will be captured and transferred through a knowledge sharing plan negotiated with ARENA and will ensure the sector is in a good position to advance commercially viable, off-grid renewable energy solutions.

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“ARENA sees mining as a huge potential off-grid user of renewable energy in Australia and congratulates Rio Tinto Alcan for paving the way for other mining operations to adopt renewable energy and offset diesel use through this landmark demonstration project.”

About ARENA

ARENA was established by the Australian Government as an independent authority on 1 July 2012 to make renewable energy technologies more affordable and increase the amount of renewable energy used in Australia. ARENA is investing in renewable energy projects, supporting research and development activities, and increasing industry and community knowledge about renewable energy.

About Rio Tinto Alcan

Rio Tinto Alcan is a global leader in the aluminium business and is one of five product groups operated by Rio Tinto, an international mining group. Rio Tinto Alcan’s Weipa bauxite mine is located on Western Cape York Peninsula. It is committed to sustainable development principles and continues to develop better ways of looking after the environment and partnering with its community stakeholders.

About First Solar

First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive photovoltaic (PV) solar systems which use its advanced module and system technology. The company’s integrated power plant solutions deliver an economically attractive alternative to fossil-fuel electricity generation today. From raw material sourcing through end-of-life module recycling, First Solar’s renewable energy systems protect and enhance the environment.

About Ingenero

Ingenero is an Australian leader in the delivery of solar energy for commercial, industrial, utility and residential customers. Its experience includes some of Australia’s most significant installations including the Kangaroo Island Visible Solar Project powering the Kingscote Airport and a fleet of electric vehicles; Fraser Coast Community Solar Farm; Alice Springs Airport CPV Solar Farm; and Australia’s largest rooftop solar power system (1.5MW) at the University of Queensland. Ingenero also completed, in November 2013, a 500kW Hybrid Solar Farm on the Island of Vava’u in Tonga.