



REWIRED Episode 3 - Viva Las Parkes. Parkes Solar farm podcast transcript

SFX	Ultimate Elvis Competition winner...
COURTNEY CARTY	The Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest winner announced at the Parkes Elvis Festival earlier this year is going to be heading over to Memphis, Tennessee... it's a festival that's run in Parkes since 1993...
SFX	Parkes Elvis Festival
MUSIC	Song: A little less conversation
CATHY TREASURE	I'm Cathy Treasure, I'm the Parkes Elvis Festival director. And I've lived in Parkes since June last year so relatively a new-comer. Look it used to be out of the ordinary but we've been running now for 25 years so it's become part of the community and something that's well known and well loved. It means so much for the town. From the moment I moved here everyone's talking about the Elvis Festival. When I first got a cab from the airport they didn't even know what job I was doing, the taxi driver's talking about the festival. It's something that brings everyone together, it brings so much expenditure to the town, really well needed dollars in the low tourist season and it's just a lot of fun.
COURTNEY CARTY	When I visited the festival had rolled out of town, jump suits packed away and the most noticeable evidence of such devotion to Elvis is a three metre tall steel sculpture of him when you drive out West.
CHRIS MARTIN	My name's Chris Martin and we're at the Court Street Motel which myself and my wife are the owner operators for the last couple of years, yeah. Two years, mmm.

CHRIS MARTIN	It's a great sporting town... it's obviously made famous by the CSIRO Dish, The Dish that was made famous in the movie. It was obviously there and played an integral role in the lunar landing in 1969 so there's still very much spin off on the back of that... it's a great thing obviously the festivals in town.
COURTNEY CARTY	Not content with one gathering of musical nostalgia... Parkes in Central New South Wales seems to have settled on three...
CHRIS MARTIN	That's now followed up by the Tullamore Irish Festival and the ABBA festival which we have in May. I don't know if we're living in the past but we seem to be getting a lot of 70s and 80s festivals which is not a bad thing.
MUSIC	THEME
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>I'm Courtney Carthy and welcome to <i>Rewired</i>... an insight into new large scale solar farms around Australia. And yes, we're in Parkes, workplace of the CSIRO radio telescope fondly known as The Dish, holiday destination of the King, and home to a new large-scale solar farm.</p> <p>The Australian Renewable Energy Agency... also known as ARENA... on behalf of the Australian Government... announced around \$90 million in funding for 12 large scale solar projects following a competitive funding round... and after years of planning, construction is getting underway in regional and rural Australian towns.</p> <p>If you haven't yet, please subscribe to the podcast on your favourite podcast app... and do leave us a review. We'd love to hear what you think about the show. This isn't the first so check our or previous episodes available in the podcast feed or at www.arena.gov.au</p>
MUSIC	THEME

SFX COURTNEY CARTY GEOFF RICE	Cafe latte \$2.60 change mate Geoff G'day Large cap' double shot two sugars. There's nowhere else at this time of morning. Laughs This is where all good meetings are held
SFX	ATMOSPHERE
COURTNEY CARTY	It's 6:45 AM and I've made it to a cold granite table in the Parkes McDonalds restaurant. Feels like I'm up to catch an exceptionally early flight when I drive through the deserted dark streets to the bright lights... I'm meeting Geoff Rice, president of the local chamber of commerce. He's a livestock trader and he's about to head south to Forbes... 30 or so kilometres away.
GEOFF RICE	Our sale probably goes for about 15 to 20 minutes... it takes longer to set it up. Sheep and lambs today.
COURTNEY CARTY	He'll meet the other guys there... but for now... we're talking about solar farms... more specifically... the new large scale solar farm currently under construction on the western boundary and what it'll mean for the Parkes.
GEOFF RICE	The majority of your jobs are coming through... whether it be accommodation, whether it be meals, and just sourcing of materials, not your major materials, just your smaller materials and things like that. Fencing and that sort of thing. And that's the use of locals, the use of locals is probably more in that field in regards to the peripherals as you say your fencing, your roads and all that sort of stuff that goes with a project like this.
COURTNEY CARTY	Yeah, I suppose Chris at the Court Street would be happy because the hotel would be a bit full.

GEOFF RICE	Yeah, that's it. Nah, spot on.
COURTNEY CARTY	Chris knows Geoff, and his brother Richard, through school... and as another business owner in Parkes... he can see where the benefits are from the new Solar Farm.
CHRIS MARTIN	What it does tend to do in a static sort of regional town where there's infrastructure town like this that doesn't necessarily expand because of new enterprise coming to town, what it does is give a flow on effect... these guys coming to town albeit for a 9 week or a 6 month project... they will need to stay somewhere, they will need to eat somewhere and they'll need to purchase things while they're here. And from our point of view while ever they're taking bed spaces, whether they're staying with us or somebody else, the spillage or remainder of the holiday guests or the visitors to the town need to stay somewhere. So it certainly does give a positive effect.
COURTNEY CARTY	In this case the new solar farm has over two hundred thousand panels... able to power almost 20,000 average homes when complete... its 50 MW output will be enough to look after the town's domestic needs. While the solar farm's life span is around 30 years it's not the only project on Geoff Rice's mind.
GEOFF RICE	It's the same with the other projects... whether it be at the water treatment works or sewage works.
COURTNEY CARTY	Chris Martin from the motel again...
CHRIS MARTIN	We've had a brand new police station built, we had a \$70 million plus hospital built in the area, we've had just over \$70 million just recently spent on our sewer and water upgrade programs. There's talk of a new fire station coming for the guys and obviously this solar farm. So, on the back of all these projects I think Parkes is well set up for the future.

COURTNEY CARTY	<p>For this project ARENA contributed nearly \$7 million... that helped activate a total of \$114 million of investment to build it... Like the Griffith solar farm a few hours south... featured in the previous episode... the developer is Neoen... they're are also working on two more further north from Parkes... one in Narromine and another just out of Dubbo.</p> <p>The projects being supported by ARENA are demonstrating to other potential renewable energy developers and financiers that building large scale solar farms and selling the electricity they generate makes commercial sense.</p> <p>As we stand now... a second large scale solar farm for Parkes is already in the works... if approved it'll be constructed adjacent to the one I've finally found and am just arriving at now.</p>
SFX / COURTNEY CARTY	I'll follow you? Great.
COURTNEY CARTY	Construction Manager Benoit Arzac has me sign in before driving onto the site... Unlike the solar farm in Griffith... construction is well underway here.
COURTNEY CARTY	Green grass, a handful of cars... and a lot of poles about a meter high sticking out of the ground.
COURTNEY CARTY	Benoit and most of the others on site today work for the construction company hired by Neoen, the solar farm developer.
SFX	Courtney, I'm Damo, nice to meet you mate
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Damo's job is safety... the most common word I hear on sites second only to hello.</p> <p>I'm decked out in P-P-E... Personal protective equipment.</p>
BENOIT ARSAC	<p>What size are you?</p> <p>*other chatter about induction</p>

COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Benoit, through his thick French accent and the sound of the ute, says the ratio of sun in Australia is incredible... better than anywhere in the world...</p> <p>And it is incredible... not only that Australia has higher rate of solar energy per land unit area than any other continent in the world... but according to 2009 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences around 10,000 times more energy from the sun landed on the country than was used by our population. It was estimated then by the National Solar Energy Centre at the CSIRO that a solar farm 50 kms wide and 50 kms long would be enough to cover us.</p> <p>For more on those statistics search for “Australian Renewable Energy Assessment” on ARENA’s website, www.arena.gov.au:</p> <p>https://arena.gov.au/assets/2013/08/Chapter-10-Solar-Energy.pdf</p> <p>Keeping the sun shining isn’t something Benoit has to worry about here... he’s firmly focused on the construction work going smoothly... he says the most important factor isn’t the roads or the equipment... it’s engaging with the local community to foster a positive relationship and understanding of how the project will impact the town and affect the surrounding environment...</p>
BENOIT ARSAC	<p>In construction the most important is the community. If the community is happy, your project will go well.</p>
DARREN GLADMAN	<p>Sure, my name is Darren Gladman, we’re in the office of the Clean Energy Council at the moment and I’m the director of smart energy for the Clean Energy Council</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Darren says this attitude towards the community is absolutely on point.</p>

DARREN GLADMAN	That stuff's really important and having the visible support for the local community so they see there's something in this for them and having ongoing jobs as well as construction jobs is really good. So far so good. You know, there have been a number of large solar developments and we haven't experienced major issues with community opposition shutting things down. But we can't take that for granted and particularly now that there are so many proposals for new solar farms it's all the more important to make sure the industry understands its obligations and goes beyond its minimum obligations and looks after the local community as best it can.
ANNE DAVISON	Hi Courtney! How are you? Nice to meet you.
COURTNEY CARTY	Hello... good morning, g'day
ANNA DAVISON	Hello, I'm Anne Davison and I'm the site clerk for Parkes Solar Farm. On a typical day I would ensure that everybody signs in and signs out of the site office, all visitors, any contractors, even Construction Australia staff, and it's mainly the running of the office - any deliveries, orders, purchase requisitions, things like that that I look after. So I'm looking after the office and making sure everything runs smoothly this side.
COURTNEY CARTY	Anne moved to Sydney from the North of England about three years and has since moved up to Parkes.
ANNE DAVISON	I moved here with my family, so we live just 10 minutes away so it's nice, it's a lovely town.
COURTNEY CARTY	Great, it's a beautiful drive to work.
ANNE DAVISON	I know! I can't complain, and it's lovely out here in the field... I see lots of parrots and kangaroos, you know, it's a nice change.
COURTNEY CARTY	Part of Anne's job is finding services locally that the solar farm needs to get built.
ANNE DAVISON	Well economically it can only be a positive impact.

COURTNEY CARTY	And that's helped by the range of services involved... it's not just fencing, steel beams and solar panels.
ANNE DAVISON	We're giving jobs to local people... you know we've got a lot of guys on site who are from the area, they're pleased that we're here today. This morning I just went to Parkes Courier Services and they were really positive about the Parkes Solar Farm being out here and the impact that it's having on the town. So, as well as my opinion and the feedback that I've been given from the residents, it's all a good move.
COURTNEY CARTY	On the other side of the office less than 10 metres away, as if by some happy coincidence, Steve MacGill is there for a chat, owner of the earth moving company that bears his name.
STEVE MACGILL	I've been here all me life, born and bred here. Kicked off our earth moving business 12 years ago and went from there.
COURTNEY CARTY	He says that even in the early stages local employment has picked up thanks to the solar farm.
STEVE MACGILL	Yeah there's a few getting involved now, once it's slowly kicking off, so, yeah there'll be more and more local people getting involved.
COURTNEY CARTY	When you talk to people socially, what do they say when you say you're working on the solar farm?
STEVE MACGILL	Oh, they're pretty interested in another project coming to town and kicking off which is good for the area and good for the town. They've obviously done their homework in the area to make sure this is the right place to do it.
COURTNEY CARTY	Chris from the Court Street Motel echoes the sentiment.
CHRIS MARTIN	In a region where we get hundreds of days a year of bright sunshine, the topography lends itself to open flat spaces that the sunshine can be taken advantage of. So, me personally I think it's a great thing for the town or for area... anything that can generate electricity supply through means that aren't coal burning has got to be a positive. I think we've got to take advantage of the wind and the natural elements including sunshine to develop energy for our communities going forward. I can only see it as a good thing.

COURTNEY CARTY	Back to Geoff at McDonalds in the early hours of that morning.
GEOFF RICE	Everyone's happy, happy that it's here. And, as I say, it's that feel-good thing. Everyone feels, as I said earlier, that they want to believe and want to be part of renewable energy... and if we can supply the paddock to put it we feel like we've done something... I've done my bit... Green power... I'm in.
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>From the three large scale solar projects we've visited so far, Kidston in Queensland, Griffith and now Parkes in New South Wales the stats are growing rapidly for the energy they'll produce when completed.</p> <p>These three will generate around 130 MW of power into the national grid... enough for nearly 50,000 homes. That's three of twelve that ARENA have funded in this competitive funding round. And there are only twelve, and the others exist around Australia already.</p>
COURTNEY CARTY	<p>Next episode we're going further north west... about two hours out of Dubbo if you were driving to Broken Hill... to a town called Nyngan</p> <p>1.3 million panels all currently generating electricity for the grid from the sun.</p> <p>The Nyngan and Broken Hill large scale solar farms were supported by ARENA in a previous funding round... Nyngan in particular is huge.</p>
NYNGAN	At that time it was the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere, that's what it was known for, so a lot of people wanted to have a look at it, see what it was about.

COURTNEY
CARTY

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And we'd love to hear what you thought - please leave a review when you can.

ARENA, along with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, are funding plenty of renewable energy projects around the country... www.arena.gov.au has plenty of information.

We're halfway through this tour of Australia's new large scale solar projects... after Nyngan we'll visit Dubbo before going to Emu Downs right across the other side of the country... 2 hours north of Perth.

I'm Courtney Carthy, thanks so much for listening to *ReWired*.