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ARENA backs First Nations hydrogen ambitions

On behalf of the Australian Government, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) has today announced a \$1,666,701 grant to Aboriginal Clean Energy Partnership Pty Ltd (ACEP) to support Phase 1 of the feasibility study for the East Kimberley Clean Energy and Hydrogen Project.

The \$3,333,403 Phase 1 feasibility study represents a key step in progressing the development, which plans to generate large scale renewable energy, renewable hydrogen and renewable ammonia for export from the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

The project aims to scale up renewable hydrogen production in Western Australia while leading the way in First Nations partnership in renewable energy developments, involving Traditional Owners as shareholders and not just stakeholders in the development phase of clean energy projects.

ARENA will work with ACEP to share best-practice lessons learnt from this partnership model, as well as capacity building opportunities and workforce development by and for First Nations groups.

ACEP was formed in 2022 as a joint venture between native title representative holders Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgab Noong Dawang Corporation (MG Corporation), Balangarra Ventures Ltd (Balangarra), and Kimberley Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (KLC) as well as climate and nature investment and advisory firm Pollination.

Each partner holds an equal share in the Partnership, which is created to oversee all aspects of project development, including cultural heritage, native title and environmental approvals, as well as overall feasibility planning. This model ensures that during its physical and commercial design phase the project is majority First Nations owned.

ARENA CEO Darren Miller said the project would demonstrate how First Nations groups can take a leadership role in the energy transition and represented the kind of development Australia needs to deliver on its national goal of becoming a renewable energy superpower.

“The energy transition and a global hydrogen race are well underway,” Mr Miller said.

“ARENA is working with ACEP to explore how First Nations communities can have a greater say and a greater stake in Australia’s renewable hydrogen ambitions.

This project will pave the way for First Nations-led renewable energy developments and ARENA will be working to ensure the lessons we learn from East Kimberley inform future projects.”

KLC Chairman, Anthony Watson agreed, saying “This project will show it is possible to design a future where economic prosperity, Indigenous empowerment and caring for country work hand in hand.”

MG Corp Executive Chair Lawford Benning said “This is an exciting and new adventure that could provide opportunities for Traditional Owners the Miriuwung, Gajerrong and Balangarra people in partnership with the Kimberley Land Council and Pollination to participate in the transition of a greener and cleaner way of working utilising our own natural resources here in the East Kimberley.

We can’t do this on our own. It takes great leadership and support of our Federal Government in collaboration with our Western Australian Government to back us in getting this right.”

Quote from Balangarra: “The old ways of making energy and of doing development have often not been good for First Nations people. We know there is a better way to do this and we are excited to be leading it.”

Quote from Pollination Head of Projects Rob Grant: “This kind of partnership will significantly de-risk this

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project, making it faster, smoother and more attractive for investment. ARENA's show of confidence in the project and the partnership is an important step for progressing what will be a development of national significance."

Phase 1 of the feasibility study will commence immediately and is due to be complete in 5 months.

If proven feasible, the proposed facility would consist of approximately 1,000 MW of solar generation paired with 850 MW of electrolysis capacity on MG Corporation land to produce 50,000 tonnes per annum of renewable hydrogen.

The hydrogen would then be transported by underground pipeline to Balangarra Country in Wyndham and combined with existing hydropower from the Ord Hydro power station to produce around 250,000 tonnes per annum of renewable ammonia for export from Wyndham Port to key trade partners in Asia as well as for domestic use.

The deployment would be one of the world's largest renewable hydrogen and ammonia production facilities with an estimated capital cost in the range of \$2.7-3.2 billion.

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