

ARENA announces \$1B Solar Sunshot program

Steph Barker,

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The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) is set to establish its Solar Sunshot program thanks to a \$1 billion funding commitment.

The Federal Government announced the establishment of the program, designed to help unlock domestic solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing across the entire supply chain and grow solar PV manufacturing in Australia, which outlines a pathway to the commercialisation of local solar PV innovation.

The program will be delivered by ARENA, with development and design to be done in collaboration with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).

ARENA Chief Executive Officer, Darren Miller, said, "ARENA has been at the forefront of building Australia's solar PV industry through its support for research, innovation and large-scale deployment. This has helped solar to become our cheapest form of energy.

"We're pleased to see the Federal Government recognise ARENA's wealth of experience and close relationships with industry by calling on us to deliver the Solar Sunshot program.

"To date, ARENA has invested more than \$830 million towards 233 solar PV projects. We are ready to take on the next step alongside others in the solar industry to create a domestic solar manufacturing industry," Mr Miller said.

Solar Sunshot is intended to provide support across the solar PV supply chain, including the scaling up of module manufacturing capabilities and exploration of other areas of the supply chain where grant funding can help kickstart the industry. This could include polysilicon, ingots and wafers, cells, module assembly, and other parts of the solar supply chain, including solar glass, advanced deployment technology, or other aspects identified through industry consultation.

ARENA funded the Australian Photovoltaic Institute's (APVI) *Silicon to Solar Report* to investigate solar manufacturing capability and potential in Australia. The report outlined a credible pathway for a domestic supply chain that could result in benefits such as securing access to solar PV components as Australia significantly scales up deployment of solar PV, creating local jobs, attracting significant private investment and unlocking potential export opportunities.

ARENA and DCCEEW said they will publish a consultation paper outlining proposed specifications for the program, including objectives, funding mechanisms, timings, and draft eligibility and merit criteria.

"Australia has the opportunity to build high quality products across the solar PV supply chain. Although we have a very small production capability today, we have the skills and the partnerships to establish a strong base that can be built on over the next decade," Mr Miller said.

"To unlock our renewable energy superpower vision, we need to be able to play a part in the whole supply chain, while also working with international partners and leveraging learnings as we build our own capability to complement the global market.

"We'll be consulting widely with industry and other stakeholders to hear their views and inform what will be a transformative scale up of Australia's solar PV manufacturing capacity."

Following the consultation period, ARENA and DCCEEW will develop the final program design.

Interested stakeholders can register their interest in participating in the consultation process at ARENA's funding page (<https://arena.gov.au/funding/solar-sunshot/>).

Industry comment

The Climate Council has welcomed the announcement and said that the initiative will cut climate pollution and create clean jobs for generations of workers across regional Australia.

Climate Council Head of Policy and Advocacy, Jennifer Rayner, said, "This is Australia's time to shine. We've got some of the best solar resources in the world and, as a nation, we love harnessing the power of the sun to electrify our lives. Already, more than three million Australian households have put panels on their roofs to save money and reduce climate pollution.

"Climate Council's new *Seize the Decade* report highlights the importance of enabling millions more households to install solar. It's key to continuing the build out of our clean energy grid, cutting climate pollution and helping families take control of their energy bills. This investment from the government is a welcome, practical step towards making that possible.

"Manufacturing solar panels here at home will make this proven technology more accessible for all Australians, and create more good, long-term jobs for our young people in regional energy hubs like the Hunter. This is what seizing the decade and securing a safer, more prosperous future for our kids looks like," Ms Rayner said.

Clean Energy Council Chief Executive, Kane Thornton, said, "Today's announcement by the Federal Government of the \$1 billion Solar Sunshot program to support the manufacturing of solar panels in Australia through production subsidies and grants is a major shot in the arm that will underpin our future as a renewable energy superpower.

“Australia has led the rest of the world in the research, development and uptake of rooftop solar systems, but we have thus far missed the opportunity to manufacture more of these components here at home. This is about to change.

"We are a country rich in renewable energy resources, such as land, coastline and sunshine that have yet to be harnessed to their full potential.

"More than 3.7 million Australian homes have installed rooftop solar, with almost half a million new systems being installed every year. This commitment will mean that more of these systems will contain products made right here in Australia.

"The missing piece of the puzzle here is establishing a strong sovereign manufacturing capability that captures this innovation and expertise to meet more of the extraordinary demand, both here and overseas, for solar products.

"We look forward to working with the government on establishing a detailed design and timely implementation of this policy," Mr Thompson said.

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