
Wednesday, 19 October 2011

WIND POWER REFORMS TO UNLOCK HUGE INVESTMENT

Green power investment worth \$1.8 billion is expected to be unlocked by State Government planning reforms for wind farms announced today.

Premier Mike Rann and Minister for Urban Development, Planning and the City of Adelaide John Rau also announced today a landmark renewable energy plan for South Australia.

Mr Rau said the wind power reforms would set new restrictions for distances between wind farm developments and dwellings, while providing new levels of assurance for investors.

He said the reforms would also reinstate local councils as the key authority for assessing planning applications for wind farms. An interim Development Plan Amendment will be gazetted today to give effect to the policy changes while consultation is under way on the package of reforms.

“These policies and the processes for implementing them will skew investment away from populated areas, while giving greater certainty and consistency to wind farm investors,” Mr Rau said.

Mr Rann said an estimated \$1.8 billion in wind farm investment was on hold, pending the reform of the State’s planning framework for wind power generation.

“The industry has been plagued by uncertainty following a court decision to uphold an objection on ‘visual amenity’ grounds, and the Victorian Government’s crack down on wind power investment,” Mr Rann said.

“As more than half of Australia’s wind farm investment is in South Australia, we have a national responsibility to take the lead in reforming policy to respect the legitimate interests of both the industry and local communities.”

The main elements of the package include:

- Amendment of Council Development Plans to provide greater consistency for assessment of wind farm development applications;
- Requiring developers to manage the visual impact of their developments, including requiring that turbines be located at least 1 kilometre from dwellings (unless both parties agree to a lesser distance);
- Removing the capacity for appeal by third parties against proposals that use this approach and which are located in sparsely populated zones;

- Similarly, proposals in sparsely populated zones and where turbines are located more than two kilometres from the periphery of country towns will not be able to be appealed by third parties.

Mr Rau said the Government would also strengthen local council decision-making by restricting the access of wind farm developers to State Government Crown Development assessment processes.

“These reforms will reverse the current trend of wind farm developers looking to have their projects assessed under the State Government Crown Development process rather than under council processes,” Mr Rau said.

“For investors, the reforms should also speed up the decision-making process so they can get a definitive ‘yes’ or ‘no’ more quickly than in the current system.”

Projects already accepted for Crown Development assessment would not be affected.

To support councils in their expanded role, the State Government will provide \$300,000 through RenewablesSA to councils that need additional help, as well as meeting the costs for an Industry Liaison Manager to work as a sounding board for communities in the mid-north.

The Clean Energy Council has estimated that \$2.8 billion has been invested in wind power in South Australia, creating 806 direct jobs and 2,417 indirect jobs. This investment accounts for 54 per cent of Australia’s installed wind power.

Mr Rann said the renewable energy plan would build on South Australia’s leadership in hosting wind and geothermal energy investment, and for our pioneering support for household solar.

Initiatives under the plan include:

- Drafting legislation to provide renewable energy investors with access to the 40 per cent of South Australia’s land mass that is Crown Land subject to pastoral lease;
- Calling for expressions of interest in the design and implementation of a concept model for a community-owned solar project;
- Beginning consultations on setting a specified limit on carbon emissions for new electricity generation, which will effectively prevent investment in new coal-fired electricity generation;
- Providing \$345,000 for the demonstration of concentrating solar power technology for heat and electricity at a horticultural greenhouse in Port Augusta.

For full details, go to www.renewablessa.sa.gov.au