



EXCLUSIVE

Foreign cloud over \$1bn solar plan

By GEOFF CHAMBERS and NOAH YIM

17 hours ago. Updated 16 hours ago



425 Comments

Foreign raiders have been given access to Anthony Albanese's Future Made in Australia funding vehicle [under the \\$1bn Solar Sunshot program](#), as the company - behind a Labor-backed Hunter Valley solar manufacturing project is hit with job losses.

The Australian can reveal [Solar Sunshot eligibility guidelines](#) have no "minimum local content requirements" and applicants must prove only that they hold an Australian Business Number and that a project will "primarily take place in Australia".

[Australian Renewable Energy Agency \(ARENA\) documents](#) show the government will "consider funding activities that occur overseas where there is a benefit to the overall (feasibility/engineering) study outcomes but will seek justification on why the activities cannot be carried out in Australia".

There is "no limitation" on foreign-owned entities applying for funding "provided that the entity meets the eligibility criteria".

[With French, Filipino, Dutch, German, Japanese and Italian companies](#), banks and financiers bankrolling renewable energy projects across Australia, foreign businesses and investors have already expressed interest in the government's taxpayer-funded solar manufacturing program.

The Australian understands the government, which views foreign investment as critical to the nation's energy transformation, is open to international businesses establishing domestic operations or working with local companies under Sunshot.

An ARENA spokesman confirmed there was “international and domestic interest” in the Sunshot program and the government was “open to domestic proponents collaborating with international partners”. The agency will hold a webinar with potential Solar Sunshot applicants next Tuesday.

“As stated in the guidelines, applicants need to be Australian registered companies and all international investment would be subject to Foreign Investment Review Board approvals,” the spokesman said.

A spokeswoman for Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen said “bringing solar manufacturing to our shores is critical for unlocking our future as a renewable energy superpower and securing jobs of the future”.

“Diverse, secure and resilient supply chains – supported by more onshore manufacturing across more of the value chain – are too important to our security and success to leave to hope.

“Now is the time to take advantage of some of the best solar resources and renewable energy expertise in the world.”

Industry figures and the Coalition have warned the Sunshot program, designed to establish a domestic solar manufacturing base, could be difficult to stand up given [Australia’s higher-cost environment and China’s market dominance.](#)

The first two rounds of ARENA funding announced by the Prime Minister – making up \$550m of the \$1bn allocated by the government – will close on April 30 and November 12 next year.

The timing of the two funding rounds, which focus on inputs to solar glass and frames, solar racking and feasibility/engineering studies for solar PV manufacturing, means it is unlikely the government will be in a position to announce successful applicants before the May election.

The Sunshot program and \$1bn in joint funding with the Queensland government for US-based company PsiQuantum, which is promising to build the world’s first fault-tolerant quantum computer in Brisbane, were the first two major Future Made in

Australia announcements made ahead of the May budget and before legislation was tabled.

Ahead of parliament returning on Monday, a Senate inquiry into the Future Made in Australia bill will release its final report on Friday. The report is expected to raise concerns around picking “winners and losers” and vague funding criteria.

Deputy Opposition Leader Sussan Ley said: “Yet again Anthony Albanese has been exposed as tricky because his so-called ‘Future Made in Australia’ plan allows taxpayer funds to be spent on overseas businesses with no requirement for Australian companies to benefit.

“Jim Chalmers told the Australian people in his budget address that this money would “give Australian firms the chance to manufacture more of the next generation of solar panels”, but this has now been exposed as deceitful,” Ms Ley said. “This plan is in tatters – how can there be a future made in Australia when this money is being sent overseas? Labor’s Future Made in Australia appears to be a future made by foreign companies.”

Opposition energy and climate change spokesman Ted O’Brien said “instead of backing local companies, Labor is opening the door for international giants to use Australian taxpayer funds to turn a profit which can be sent offshore”.

Mr Albanese and Mr Bowen unveiled the Sunshot program on March 28 at the former Liddell coal-fired power station site, alongside AGL and SunDrive executives who announced a memorandum of understanding to establish a commercial-scale advanced solar manufacturing facility in Muswellbrook.

SunDrive, which has received two ARENA grants totalling \$14m since 2020, was last month forced to shed up to 35 jobs amid a management restructure. The Sydney-based company will be applying for further support under the Sunshot program.

SunDrive on Wednesday said it was “working closely in partnership with AGL under our ongoing memorandum of understanding to explore feasibility of the AGL Hunter Energy Hub”.

TRENDING



'Bill has given everything': PM's tribute as Shorten announces retirement

Anthony Albanese has paid tribute to former Labor leader Bill Shorten as he announced the NDIS Minister's retirement from politics at a press conference this morning, bringing down the curtain on a 17-year parliamentary career.

By GREG BROWN, NOAH YIM



The voice was defeated ... so, why do we carry on accepting Indigenous separatism?

What's becoming clear is that it wasn't enough to defeat the voice. As long as our mental landscape is dominated by Aboriginal separatism – the welcomes to country and the different flags – the referendum will simply stand as a battle won in the lost war for one Australia.

By PETA CREDLIN



Economic woes to intensify as we face stagflation

Australia is set for a chronic attack of stagflation. But stagflation in mid 2020s will be caused by different forces than those that ravaged the mid-1970s. Sadly, our politicians were too young to understand what was happening.

By ROBERT GOTTLIEBSEN



Green pioneer Volvo abandons pledge to sell only electric cars

The Swedish car marque, renowned for its environmental commitment, has scrapped plans to sell only fully electric cars by 2030 in the latest sign of a global



'Huge win' for the bush: ACCC approves Optus, TPG's \$1.6bn deal

Telstra's regional monopoly may be smashed after the competition watchdog green lit a mega network sharing deal between the nation's second and third-biggest telcos.



'Time is running out': Hamas publishes more hostage videos

After publishing three videos of the executed captives over the last two days, Hamas today released the last messages of Carmel Gat, 40, and Alexander Lobanov, 32.

slowdown in growth for
battery-powered vehicles.

By ROBERT LEA

By JARED LYNCH

By STAFF WRITERS, AGENCIES
