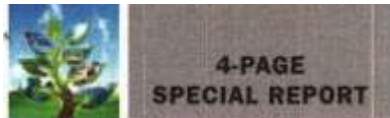


Gas rethink fuels push for renewable sources



Adam Orlando

THE state could have been up to \$2 billion better off if the Carpenter government had actively pursued renewable energy projects at the start of the decade, according to WA Sustainable Energy Association chief executive Ray Wills.

With the Department of Treasury and Finance predicting the cost of the Varanus Island gas rupture at \$2 billion, Dr Wills said the June incident jolted the state to rethink its energy supply security and heightened awareness of WA's dependence on natural gas and coal.

He said if half of that \$2 billion had been invested in viable renewable energy sources the state would not be facing such a large cost.

"I think what we've seen going on in the Senate enquiry into the gas incident is that there is a potential for WA to build renewable energy projects that can cope with energy demand and give some security to the energy supply here in the state," Dr Wills said.

To date, only 4 per cent of the state's energy generation is from renewable sources, mostly wind and landfill gas.

While there is a whole raft of renewable energy projects either proposed or under way in WA, Dr

Wills believes more investment must be made into the growing sector, particularly in wave farms and solar thermal energy.

In WA, wave-powered electricity is one step closer to reality with trials of a technology called Cylindrical Energy Transfer Oscillating yielding promising results.

Carnegie Corporation is developing the system, with tests carried out in Fremantle verifying predictions of how much electricity and water the technology can produce under various wave conditions.

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Carnegie Corporation managing director Michael Ottaviano said recently that 35 per cent of Australia's current base-load power needs could be economically generated by waves.

Dr Wills said with the majority of the state's 20 million residents living near the coast, beaches could play an even more important part in generating power in WA.

"Australia is the Middle East of renewable energy and we are failing to harvest the energy bonanza for the benefit of the Australian economy,"

Dr Wills told *WA Business News*.

Solar power, in particular advanced solar thermal technology, is also slated to play a major role in WA.

Australia's largest engineering services company, WorleyParsons Ltd, is looking at the Pilbara region to locate a \$1 billion thermal solar power station.

The company has undertaken a study backed by mining giants Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton to locate 34 of the 250-megawatt solar power stations in Australia by 2020, with the initial unit proposed to start up in 2011.

Managing director of WorleyParsons' EcoNomics unit, Peter Meurs, said the first potential site for the station could power 100,000 houses.

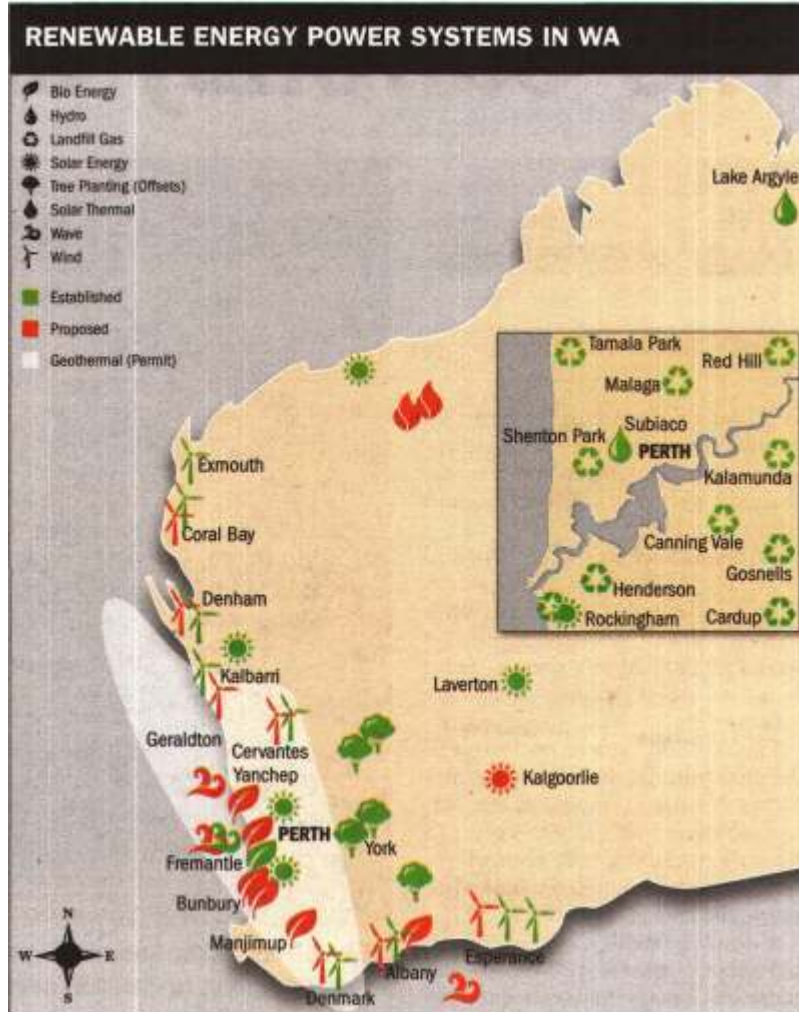
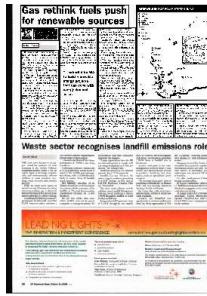
Also looking to establish a major solar power project in the Pilbara is Indian fertiliser tycoon Pankaj Oswal, who has mooted a plan for a \$1.5 billion solar power project, set for a 2013 start.

In addition, California-based Ausra, which develops utility-scale solar thermal power, is assessing potential solar projects in WA's north.

The company, which has an Australian offices in Melbourne and Sydney, is reportedly just months away from signing a memorandum of understanding with a company to develop a solar project in WA.

Other projects on the horizon include New World Energy Solutions' proposed small-scale five-megawatt demonstration plant up in the Perth Basin.

Last month, the company was one of the first to be granted an exploration licence by the state government for



the Perth Basin, which has potential to supply electricity to the Perth metropolitan area and to resource projects in the Mid West region.

New World Energy is focused on generating electricity from geothermal resources with a view to eventually develop power stations capable of generating between 30MW and 50MW of electricity.

As Australia looks to cap carbon emissions with targets for renewable energy and the introduction of carbon

credits, activity in the renewable energy sector has surged over the past few years.

Dr Wills said wind farms were a viable option for power generation, however they needed to be spread out across the state to reach their potential.

Already generating power are the Albany wind farm, about 12 kilometres south-west of the city centre, and wind farms near Denham, Kalbarri and Denmark.