

## Winds of Change: Australia's move to Renewable Electricity Generation

By Brian Jones

With Australia's reputation for its balmy days, rolling surf and abundant sunshine, it's a little ironic that wind is likely to provide the continent's significant growth in renewable energy for the next decade and possibly beyond. Past and present administrations have worked to put energy initiatives in motion. Former Prime Minister John Howard's administration legislated a target of 20 percent of generation from renewable sources by 2020. Current Prime Minister Kevin Michael Rudd and his administration have proposed legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 5 percent—and with international support, possibly as much as 20 percent—on 2000 levels by 2020. These set a clear agenda for change in Australian coal-dependent electricity generation landscape. Wind is easily the most commercial viable option available for the foreseeable future.

In terms of wind prospects, the states of South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania hold the most promise with significant areas exposed to consistent winds from the southern ocean. South Australia has been particularly proactive with its state government putting in place a planning framework for wind energy. The state's premier Mike Rann recently called the plan "Australia's best practice for speed, transparency and predictability." And the results seem to support his claim. South Australia is predicted to reach its 20% target in 2013 a year ahead of its own aggressive goal. They currently have 56% percent of Australia's wind generation capacity and have decided to set an even more aggressive target of one-third of its generation coming from renewable sources by 2020. Impressive stuff! Although industry participants claim other governments have been slow to respond, there does appear to be some action with a slew of projects slated for Victoria.

It is predicted that the shift to renewable generation could see \$50 billion spent on capital works in the next decade, certainly significant in the Australian landscape. We also need to remember that wind usually only blows 30 percent of the time, and where it does blow is often in a pretty remote location. Getting all that energy to us in a city somewhere and ensuring we have sufficient capacity—even when the wind doesn't blow—is exercising the minds of many in the industry right now.

But attitudes can be slow to change. A prominent Tasmanian investor recently announced a plan to install four wind turbines on top of an inner city office block in Hobart, Tasmania, to offset greenhouse emissions. The plan was rejected by Hobart City Council, which said the turbines interfered with the visual landscape of the city.