

'Largest community-owned' solar farm in Australia taking root in Canberra vineyard

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Lawrence McIntosh, of SolarShare Canberra, at the solar array in the grounds of Canberra Youth Haven, off Kambah Pool Road, Kambah. The company is building a new solar farm at Majura. *Photo: Graham Tidy*

There are two reasons Canberra's David Osmond puts his money into solar panels rather than stockpiling it in the bank.

"The returns are better plus it's going towards a cause I'm very passionate about," he said.

The latest solar project Mr Osmond will invest in will be the largest community-owned solar farm in Australia – and it will be right here in Canberra.

Mr Osmond is one of the first investors in the SolarShare Community Energy Majura Solar Farm, a \$3 million solar plant that, when built, will generate enough electricity to power 250 Canberra homes.

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SolarShare project leader Lawrence McIntosh said more than 5000 solar panels will be mounted on three hectares leased from the Mount Majura Vineyard, producing 1.9GWh of electricity each year.

"Wine grapes are best grown on slopes, which leaves the flatter land at the bottom of the valley with not much interest for grape growing but great for a solar project," he said.

While only 5 per cent of the size of the Royalla Solar Farm south of Canberra, this one will be owned by the community, investors pledging \$50 to \$10,000 each towards its construction and maintenance.

About 400 people have registered as investors so far and more are being welcomed, Mr McIntosh said.

The flagship farm is predicted to earn more than \$360,000 a year in revenue from selling electricity to the energy networks, its profits shared among the project's investors.

The company has applied for a fixed-price feed-in tariff of 20¢ a kilowatt-hour generated for 20 years.

While this plant will have the largest output out of all of the community-owned solar plants in Australia, Mr McIntosh sees it as part of a growing movement of consumers taking control over their "energy future".

"We think it's important for local ownership to have a big role as we build new energy assets," Mr McIntosh said.

"We're seeing the end of life for our existing generators, they've been around for quite a long time so as we replace them, I think it's really great that there's local investment in those and a greater awareness of the impact that energy generation has and a greater level of choice in what energy generation can be."

For Mr Osmond, who also works in the renewable energy sector, the benefits aren't just financial.

"I'm concerned about climate change and fossil fuel emissions, the damage they're doing to the atmosphere, so I'm very supportive of transitioning away from fossil fuels with solar and wind," he said.

People keen to invest can attend a [briefing](#) on Wednesday, June 29, from 7pm at the Finkle theatre, John Curtin School of Medical Research, ANU.

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