

PROGRAM UPDATE

The beginning of the 2009/10 financial year sees Bushlight entering into another new phase. Bushlight's Regional Teams have recently been preparing updated Regional Energy Plans, detailing the energy supply arrangements for the vast majority of homelands spread throughout central and northern Australia. Once the Regional Energy Plans have been finalised and approved, the next capital works program will be determined, seeing new Bushlight renewable energy (RE) system installations in all four Bushlight regions.

The Bushlight maintenance program will continue auditing RE systems nominated for the program. At the end of June 2009 Bushlight was responsible for the maintenance of 220 RE systems nationally. The total number could exceed 300 by the end of this year. In addition to this core work Bushlight will be working in a number of new, but related areas including demand side management and energy efficiency training for community residents. More information will be provided throughout the year on all of these activities.

ENTERPRISES ON COUNTRY IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Engaging in the mainstream economy is not easy for residents of remote communities. Among other challenges, the distance from markets creates a significant hurdle to successful enterprise development. But three homelands in Central Australia are rising to the challenge with impressive results. The homelands of Wanmarra, Ulpanyali and Akanta have been working hard to establish a horticulture business with the support of Ngurratjuta Aboriginal Corporation. Each community has a Bushlight RE system and Wanmarra resident Peter Abbot spoke to Bushlight about how the new business was going.

Wanmarra residents have established a five hectare vegetable garden in their community. This season they are growing three types of gourmet tomato, as well as pumpkin, squash, zucchini, corn and cabbage. Just three months into the first season, they had harvested and sold 1 tonne of zucchini, 100 cartons of tomatoes and several boxes of "spaceship" squash. The first crops in the project were planted earlier in the year, in time for the winter season and will be sold to Red Centre Produce in Alice Springs as well as the local Kings Canyon Store.

The three participating communities are working cooperatively and are focusing on growing different vegetables in order to maximise the market potential and provide buyers with a well-rounded selection.

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Peter Abbott of Wanmarra, shows Bushlight's Marteena McKenzie around the garden



Peter Abbott, Cathy Abbott and Christine Braeden packing the freshly picked tomatoes

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Florence Reed of Wanmarra is proud of the fresh produce on the farm and enjoys helping with the harvesting and packing

Currently 22 residents across the three communities are employed in the project through the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. With support and training from Ngurratjuta, residents work on all aspects of the production line, from preparing the soil, planting, pest control, reticulation, fertilising, harvesting, sorting, weighing and packing. In the near future there will also be a horticulture training course

for CDEP participants. The project is building solid business skills for project leaders such as Peter, whose enthusiasm and drive has set the foundation for a successful business over the coming seasons.

Many remote homelands spend significant time and money in running and maintaining diesel generators to provide perhaps a few hours of power each day. For example, prior to the installation of a Bushlight RE system, Ulpanyali residents spent approximately \$10,000 per year on diesel for their generator. The Bushlight RE systems at these communities provide residents with reliable, cost effective energy services. Having access to reliable 24 hour power can act as a point of leverage from which to achieve aspirations and develop community projects.

RE INDUSTRY AWARD FOR BUSHLIGHT

Bushlight has received a joint award with Ogden Electrical for 'Designing and Installing a Stand-alone Solar Photovoltaic Energy System over 5 kW' at the Clean Energy Council's Appropriate Technology Retailers Association of Australia (ATRAA) Conference. The award was for the design and installation of the system at Ulpanyali community in Central Australia which can support a maximum load of 38.6 kWh per day. ATRAA is the largest annual forum for members of the renewables industry in Australia.

The conference, in its 32nd year, was attended by a small cohort from Bushlight's Technical Services team as well as several members of the Centre for Appropriate Technology's CAT Projects. The ATRAA conference attracts major industry participants which this year included 600 delegates ranging from representatives of large solar panel manufacturers to smaller businesses involved with the supply and installation of photovoltaic systems. The attendance was significantly higher than in previous years reflecting the steady growth of Australia's renewables industry.



Lindsay Hart of Selectronic presents the award to Rede Ogden of Ogden Electrical (middle) and Bushlight's David Donnelly (right)

Image courtesy of Ecogeneration

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