

Welcome

Welcome to the first Bushlight newsletter. This aims to bring all parties up-to-date with developments and outline plans for the first phase of work.

Bushlight will increase access to sustainable energy services for remote off-grid communities of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia.

Bushlight is a Joint Venture of the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Australian Cooperative Research Centre for Renewable Energy. It will deploy a combination of funds provided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and The Australian Greenhouse Office in order to achieve the following:-

- Establish operations across the four states and territories within our remit;
- Improve reliability and cost effectiveness of RE energy systems in target communities
- Build the capacity and confidence needed to sustain RE services within these communities;
- Establish RE systems in target communities

Bushlight is not a funding program. It commences in April 2002 for a four-year period. During this time, we aim to collaborate closely with ATSI Regional Councils, the Australian renewable energy industry, State and Territory Governments to develop a consistent model of technology and operation to deliver renewable energy services to communities.

The history behind Bushlight

Bushlight was established through an understanding of the challenges of bringing energy to remote communities in Australia. In 1999, the Australian Cooperative Research Centre for Renewable Energy (ACRE) commissioned a study of isolated energy systems in remote areas. The survey found out what users had to say about renewable energy. To undertake the survey, ACRE worked with the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT).



A total of some 88 Indigenous communities across WA, SA, QLD and the NT were surveyed. Typically the sites were outstations consisting of between one and five houses; perhaps with a workshop and almost always with bore water.

Only 65% of systems were working at the time of the survey. The cause of system breakdowns included lack of demand management, complex non-standard technology, lack of trained staff and little local technical support. Overall the survey confirmed a need for a different approach, moving from technological solutions to a holistic approach to energy services.

Bushlight will take a demand-responsive approach to meeting community energy needs. This envisages communities making their own informed decisions on the level of infrastructure they require based on their needs, priorities and capacity to sustain the services. International experience has shown that such infrastructure has a greater chance of being sustainable if the level of service matches consumer reality.

Bushlight & the Renewable Energy Industry

Bushlight provides opportunities for the renewable energy industry in Australia. It will ensure that the combined experience and knowledge of companies are taken into account in the approach that we take. This process has now started. We plan to invite expressions of interest for Bushlight in the Weekend Australian on 11th May 2002. This will also be available through the Internet at <http://www.icat.org.au/bushlight> and linked through <http://www.acre.murdoch.edu.au>

Those parties who express interest and meet the criteria for participation in Bushlight will be invited to participate in a workshop in Alice Springs in early July 2002. You will also be invited to join us at the launch event itself. The workshop will achieve the following:-

- Presentation of the Bushlight objectives and plan
- Description of proposed outline design for Bushlight RE systems
- Discussion of ways in which the industry can engage with Bushlight
- Presentation of the role of ACRElab, detailing component and systems testing.
- Instructions and timing for tender processes

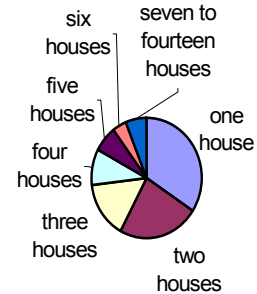
We are seeking to achieve a one-day workshop with ample time for discussion and feedback. The goal will be to foster collaboration between industry players and the Bushlight venture. Your comments and inputs will be very welcome. After the workshop, we will proceed according to a timetable for the first year that will be presented to the national steering committee in June.

Bushlight & Regional Councils

ATSIC Regional Councils have received a letter from the National Housing and Infrastructure Centre of ATSIC advising them of the commencement of Bushlight and information on how to contact us. We have started to receive enquiries and have visited several councils already.

Our plan for working with Regional Councils is as follows:-

- Bushlight will establish at least one full-time member of staff for each of our regional offices over the coming weeks. These are located in Alice Springs, Derby, Cairns and the Top End of the Northern Territory (exact location to be confirmed).
- We will undertake a program of presentations, visits and contact with Regional Councils, aiming to reach all of them by December 2002.
- In each case, we will request that Regional Councils make recommendations as to those communities that they would like to be considered for improved energy services through Bushlight.
- We will then assess each community for their eligibility according to criteria which will be made available to Councils and communities (see box below).
- Regional Councils and relevant resource agencies will be kept informed of progress once Bushlight starts to discuss opportunities in their area. They are also welcome to contact us at any time using the contact details at the foot of this newsletter.
- Bushlight proposes a rollout starting in Central Australia and Kimberley.



Proportion of eligible outstation communities with 1-7 houses.

Bushlight & Indigenous Communities

Each Bushlight office will employ an Indigenous liaison officer and a Regional Manager who will manage both the procurement process and the work with communities and Regional Councils.

Communities are welcome to contact our local staff with any questions or to request a visit. This is already happening and we are recording enquiries until such time as permanent Bushlight are appointed.

From our analysis of CHINS survey data, the majority of the eligible outstations are likely to be outstations with one or two permanently occupied houses. In these houses occupancy is also found to be the highest. Hence system designs are initially focusing on these outstations.

Individual household PV power systems will be the initial focus for these smaller communities. Separate DC and AC systems will respectively meet essential (ie fridge and some lights) and other energy services in each houses. The physical layout and component sizing will be decided by the community during the consultation period.

Eligibility

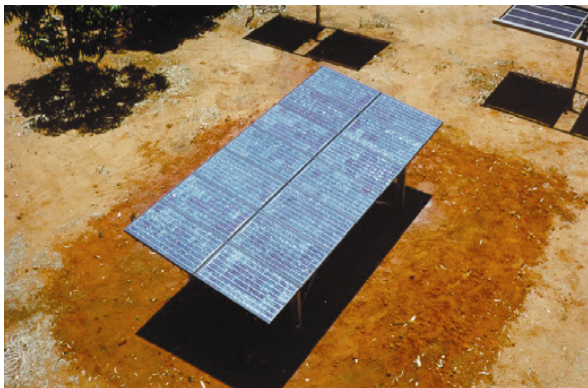
To be eligible for consideration under Bushlight, communities will need to meet the following basic criteria:

- Population - Under 50 people live in the community;
- Location - The community is 'off-grid' (does not have access to grid power)
- Land tenure - Secure land tenure or occupation.
- Buildings - At least one permanent construction that conforms to standards.
- Power supply - Either no power currently available or diesel system being used. Communities with RE systems are eligible.

This constitutes level 1 eligibility. Meeting these criteria permits further screening against criteria for other factors, such as access, occupancy, cost recovery and management.

Ultimately, the final agreements for locations of Bushlight systems will be subject to discussion between Regional Councils and Bushlight.

Contacts



There is one set of contact details for all enquiries to Bushlight;

Bushlight
32-38 Priest St
Alice Springs NT 0870

Tel. (08) 8951 4311

bushlight@icat.org.au

<http://www.icat.org.au/bushlight>

The AGO / ATSIC Steering committee have approved a project implementation plan and recruitment is taking place. See the Bushlight vacancies website for positions.