

MUERI HEADS EFFORT TO REGAIN RENEWABLE ENERGY

Murdoch is now Australia's leading centre for renewable energy systems research, according to Associate Professor Philip Jennings, Director of the University's Energy Research Institute (MUERI).

One-third of all Federal Government funds for renewable energy research were awarded to the Institute's scientists this year and many of their projects have the potential to be major export earners in the future.

"But the lead Australia had in renewable energy research, particularly in solar energy, has been lost to northern Europe and Japan," Associate Professor Jennings said. "Until very recently our Governments and industries have not had a good record in supporting research and development, so our technological breakthroughs have been lost to overseas concerns."

Swedish and Japanese companies had improved the solar energy water heating technology pioneered by the CSIRO and were now exporting to markets on Australia's doorstep.

Share

Associate Professor Jennings said Australia needed to wrest back a share of the renewable energy market because there was a huge potential market — in solar power units alone — in remote and developing areas.

"Our small team has already developed solar power supply units and solar powered water pumping equipment ideally suited to the needs of remote areas," he said. "They have been exhaustively tested and the power supply units are now being used under the harshest desert conditions in W.A."

"Portable solar packs, housed in converted shipping containers, are providing refrigeration, lighting, radio, television and communications to remote aboriginal communities.

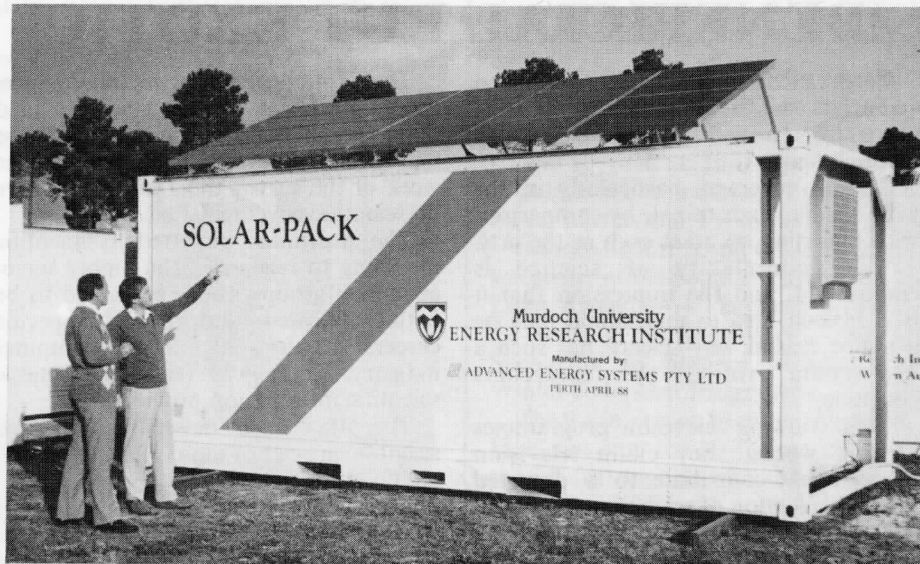
"With commercial marketing support, these low-maintenance packs could fill a profitable niche in overseas markets — particularly where location rules out conventional power reticulation."

Desert

The packs, currently servicing Aboriginal homeland settlements of between 30 and 50 people in such as areas as the Great Sandy Desert, are designed to handle variations in power use which would create serious maintenance problems for diesel-powered units.

Aboriginal communities can even go walk-about for days or even weeks, leaving their perishable food supplies safely stored in a MUERI-modified freezer drawing about a third of the power needed for conventional household units.

The solar-power pack and its specially-modified appliances are the work of MUERI's four full-time research staff — all of them recruited from the former Solar Energy Research Institute which the State Government disbanded, as an economy measure, in late 1986.



MUERI researcher Stephen Phillips describes the features of one of the solar-packs to Murdoch News editor Russ Elsegood. Ten packs have so far been built and sold for use in remote communities.