New Victorian windfarm could provide 10% of state's energy

Golden Plains approved by Andrews government and awaits federal consent to proceed

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Sat 12 Jan 2019 14.00 EST

The managing director of a company that plans to construct Victoria’s largest windfarm says the project will supply enough power to replace up to a third of the generation of the decommissioned Hazelwood power station at less than $50/MWh.

The Victorian government has granted a planning permit for WestWind Energy’s $1.5bn Golden Plains windfarm, which will become one of the largest windfarms in the southern hemisphere.

The project is now awaiting federal approval to proceed.

The windfarm would span 17,000 hectares on land 60km north-west of Geelong and generate more than 3000 gigawatt hours of electricity per year – enough to power more than 400,000 homes.
Tobias Geiger, the managing director of WestWind Energy, said the large scale project would be able to supply energy at low cost.

“With this very large project and very good wind resource, combined with the latest wind turbine technology that's now available, we can achieve a levelised cost of energy for this project that is below $50 per MW/h,” he said.

“If you put that into the context of electricity market prices from Victoria which for the past two years have hovered around $80 to $120 per MW/h, you can see the significance of this project for driving down electricity prices for all Victorians.”

The company has begun detailed design work and an application for grid connection through the Australian Energy Market Operator.

That process will take about a year before construction could commence.

The Victorian government’s approval of the project requires the company to increase the turbine-free buffer area to protect nesting grounds used by native brolga birds.

That will reduce the original proposal from 228 turbines and may result in a reduction to 181 turbines. Geiger said on Saturday the company estimated it would construct around 200 turbines.

“We’re facing very exciting times for renewable energy and in particular the transition from thermal generation to renewables,” he said.

“The Golden Plains windfarm will replace about one third of the generation of the Hazelwood power station. Probably within the next three or four years, the gap that was left by Hazelwood will be well and truly filled.”

The Andrews government has increased Victoria’s renewable energy target to 50% by 2030.

“This project will create hundreds of local jobs, reduce greenhouse emissions and generate enough electricity to power more than 400,000 homes - boosting supply and putting downward pressure on power prices,” the acting planning minister Lily D’Ambrosio said.

Simon Holmes à Court, a senior advisor at the Climate and Energy College at Melbourne University, said bigger turbines, better sites, economies of scale and more competitive financing “have literally halved the cost of wind energy”.

“At $50/MWh – just 5 cents per kWh – the Golden Plains windfarm will produce power for less than the market cost of fuel alone for many coal and all gas power stations,” he said.

“And it's big – expected to provide between 8–10% of Victoria’s energy.”

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