



RENEWABLE ENERGY IN AUSTRALIA

About Renewable Energy

You use energy every day. Your electronic devices use energy. Every time you turn on a light it uses energy. Heating the hot water for your showers and baths uses energy. When you ride in a car, bus, train or plane it is using energy. As you read this information, the computer or device is using energy (or if you printed it, the printer used energy).

Australia is one of the most energy hungry nations in the world – we consume a lot of energy! So, where does all this energy come from? How is it generated? Is it safe for the environment?

You have probably heard the term ‘renewable energy’, but do you know what it is? Read on to find out.



What is renewable energy?

Renewable energy is any form of energy that is produced using natural resources that are constantly replaced (they never run out). For example solar energy which comes from the sun, or wind power harnessed through turbines. The sun and wind are renewable resources that never run out, they can be used again and again and again.

In contrast, non-renewable energy sources are those that rely on ‘finite’ resources such as coal, oil and gas. These are finite as they will eventually run out and are not replaced.



RENEWABLE ENERGY IN AUSTRALIA

A history of renewable energy

It might surprise you to know that before the discovery of coal deposits, most of the energy used (with a few exceptions) was generated via renewable sources, particularly burning plant material to produce light and heat. Here are some other ways renewable sources were used:

- solar power to cook food
- animal power to drive vehicles or turn millstones/turbines
- wind power in the form of windmills and boat sails
- hydro (water) power through construction of dams.

When coal deposits were discovered, the way humans produced energy also changed. We started to build power plants that generated electricity by burning coal and later oil and gas. These fuels were an efficient and relatively cheap way to produce electricity on a large scale.

As time has gone on, we have discovered that burning fossil fuels has side effects. Burning coal, oil and gas causes harmful gases, such as carbon dioxide, to be emitted into the atmosphere which is contributing to global warming.

Over the last few decades, scientists, environmentalists, politicians and the general public have acknowledged that we cannot keep burning fossil fuels. They are bad for the environment and will eventually run out.

