DLR and the Australian Solar Institute sign agreement on joint research into concentrating solar energy technology

16 March 2011

At a meeting in Berlin on 16 March 2011, the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt, DLR) and the Australian Solar Institute (ASI) agreed to cooperate on research into concentrating solar energy technology. Senator Kim Carr, the Australian Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, and Ulrich Wagner, the DLR Executive Board Member for Energy and Transport, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support this initiative. The technology is best suited to regions with high levels of solar radiation, which includes large parts of Australia.

"An excellent basis for reducing the cost of solar power"

"Australia's commitment to a climate-friendly energy supply, its excellent research infrastructure and, of course, its high levels of solar radiation are an excellent basis for us to work together on reducing the cost of solar power using technology developed by DLR," said Ulrich Wagner about the partnership. DLR has been researching concentrating solar energy technology for over 30 years, and has one of the largest research teams in the world.

Senator Carr emphasised the importance of research and innovation in delivering results that will benefit Australia and the international community, saying it will benefit the environment and energy security: "This latest initiative will bring together Australia's best solar energy researchers with those in Germany, to accelerate the technology breakthroughs required to allow solar energy to become a sustainable energy source in the future in Australia, Germany and around the world," Senator Carr said.

ASI Executive Director Mark Twidell said, "The partnership provides Australian researchers with the opportunity to investigate cost and efficiency improvements in concentrating solar power alongside the other leaders in the field, DLR." The Australian Government through its Clean Energy Initiative has committed five billion Australian dollars for the research, development and demonstration of low carbon dioxide energy technologies. The Australian Solar Institute was established as part of this initiative, supporting Australian research and development activities in the area of solar energy with a total budget of 150 million Australian dollars.

Cooperation planned in many areas

To use their resources as effectively as possible, the partners intend to carry out joint research projects and exchange views on the opportunities and risks of various technologies and markets. They also intend to offer mutual support for internal evaluations and project assessments, and work together in graduate and post-graduate training with a scientist exchange programme. The partners will also promote the setting up of a German-Australian funding programme for this area of research.

As the first step in the partnership, researchers plan on building a reactor system developed at DLR, which uses solar energy to convert methane into hydrogen. This will be done at the test facility of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) National Solar Energy Centre (NSEC) in Newcastle, New South Wales. There, the DLR system's performance will be compared with that of Australian systems.

Contacts

Dorothee Bürkle
German Aerospace Center (DLR)
Media Relations, Energy and Transport Research
Tel.: +49 2203 601-3492
Fax: +49 2203 601-3249
Dorothee.Buerkle@dlr.de

Univ.-Prof. Dr.-Ing. Robert Pitz-Paal
German Aerospace Center (DLR)
Solar Research
Tel.: +49 2203 601-2744
Fax: +49 2203 601-4141

Signing the agreement with the Australian Solar Institute

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Credit: Australian Embassy Berlin.

Using the Sun – parabolic trough power plant in Almería, southern Spain

DLR is conducting research into energy for the future in Stuttgart, Cologne and Almeria, southern Spain.

With thermal storage, the electricity production of solar-thermal power plants can be decoupled from variations in solar radiation. Solar-thermal power plants could then provide a more uniform flow of power, operating even at night or during heavy cloud cover.

Credit: DLR (CC-BY 3.0).

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