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SPRAY-ON MATERIAL TO LEAD TO CHEAPER SOLAR PANELS

A new spray-on material that could make solar panels cheaper is to be developed in a joint research effort announced today by The Australian National University (ANU) and Spark Solar Australia.

As one of two new projects worth a combined \$1.85 million, the spray-on project will focus on a new way to treat the surface of a solar cell, the core component inside a solar panel that converts sunlight to electricity. The project will be run with the Finnish materials company Braggone Oy.

"It will provide an opportunity for significant manufacturing cost reductions by replacing the conventional, expensive manufacturing techniques that are currently employed industry-wide with the spray-on films," said Dr Keith McIntosh from ANU, the chief investigator in the first project.

The second project will investigate methods to change the surface of a solar cell to improve its efficiency. This project will be run in conjunction with German solar company GP Solar and led by chief investigator Dr Klaus Weber from ANU. "We aim to develop a range of industry-ready cell fabrication sequences that will offer significantly improved conversion efficiencies" Dr Weber said.

The projects are a further extension of solar research at ANU, which is recognised internationally as a leader in the research and development of photovoltaics. Both projects are supported by the Australian Research Council under the Linkage Projects scheme.

Spark Solar Australia is a new company that is raising \$60 million and will build a factory in the ACT region to commence solar cell production in 2010. The operations will create more than 100 new jobs, including high-tech research positions. The factory will initially produce eight million solar cells per year, enough to power about 10,000 Australian homes, using state-of-the-art manufacturing technology.

Spark's Interim CEO Dr Michelle McCann said that in the current booming solar market it is essential for photovoltaic companies to be dynamic and innovative in order to be successful. "Spark plans to stay at the forefront of advances in manufacturing technology via innovations likely to arise from collaborative research projects such as these," Dr McCann said.

Professor Andrew Blakers, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems at ANU, said that projects such as these ensure that industry can benefit from leading-edge research while also ensuring that the public research community stays relevant to industry. "It is the perfect time for a photovoltaic industry to take-off in Australia, and these exciting collaborative research projects will show that Australia's world leading photovoltaic research can now lead directly to significant competitive advantages to industry in Australia" said Professor Blakers. Both projects will start immediately and run until the end of 2011.

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