

Opinion

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### **Newcastle's role in Australia's clean energy future**

Over the past two years, Newcastle's businesses, research institutions and community leaders have worked together to position Newcastle as a leader in clean energy innovation.

A lot of hard work later, it is pleasing to see that Newcastle is ready to deliver on that vision.

This week I announced on behalf of the Rudd Government that Newcastle had been chosen as the location for the first and only Clean Energy Innovation Centre for Australia (CEIC).

The Centre will support businesses operating in the clean energy field by helping them become more innovative, efficient and competitive. First, it will offer a comprehensive, on-site and free Business Review, to eligible firms which will help them identify ways they can improve their business. Second, it will give matching grants of up to \$20,000 to firms to help them implement the recommendations of the review. Finally, it will provide ongoing assistance by mentoring firms, plugging them into research and technology networks and linking them with supply chains and export markets.

And that's why Newcastle was chosen. Our expertise in the energy field is embedded in the region and we have the edge in providing to the clean energy sector those complementary services and support that will make their businesses competitive and productive. Our local research institutes – The CSIRO Energy Transformed Flagship and Division, the Australian Solar Institute and the University of Newcastle's priority centres in clean energy represent a critical mass of knowledge and expertise. Our knowledge-based manufacturing networks have a track record of collaboration and success. We host extensive business support infrastructure as well as being able to tap into the skills that flow from our University's graduate business programs and local commercial financial management firms such as Ernst Young who supported the Newcastle bid for the CEIC.

Newcastle is now well positioned to fulfil the needs of any business operating in the clean energy sector.

This is a big investment for our region – the Rudd Government is committing \$20 million to the Centre over four years. The Centre will provide new local jobs and tap our city into networks that reach around the nation and the wider Asia-Pacific region. As my Colleague Kim Carr, the Minister for Innovation said recently, we want to help businesses keep their lights on during these dark economic times. And in the longer term, we want those lights to be generated by cleaner energy sources.

With the ongoing need for economic growth and diversification, the new clean energy industry should be encouraged to locate here – firms such as Spark Solar Australia, recently granted Major Project Facilitation status by the Rudd Government and reported to be looking for a suitable location for its \$60 million solar cell manufacturing facility. State and local government now need to play a major role in attracting those new green-industry players to our region.

So this announcement represents much more than a cash injection. In recognising Newcastle as a national hub for clean energy technology and innovation it provides real commercial advantage for ongoing economic and employment development. It also places our region at the forefront of Australia's fight against climate change.

We have a special responsibility to play a key part in this global fight - our coal exports and our heavy industries mean that Newcastle has a large carbon footprint. Being a part of the climate change solution doesn't mean we need to deny that heritage or our economic strengths. But it does mean we have to think strategically about how we can continue to advance our region toward meeting the 20% by 2020 renewable energy target and the carbon reduction targets being advanced by the Rudd Government.

Our region now needs to lead the way. And I have every confidence we are ready to do so

In 2007 I visited California in the United States to investigate first-hand how that region has built on its high-tech, knowledge based industries to create new opportunities in sustainable energy. I returned to Newcastle more confident than ever that we could become the next Silicon Valley of the sustainable energy industry. That idea is no longer just a vision.

The decision to locate this Clean Energy Centre in Newcastle taps into the existing clean energy synergies we have created and complements the many environmental and energy conservation activities undertaken in Newcastle since it hosted the first Pathways to Sustainability Conference in 1997. A job very well done!

Newcastle residents are passionate about their community and the environment. I am proud to deliver an initiative that embodies that character, boosts our economy, and positions us to lead the global fight against climate change.