



## Ausra La Vista, Baby

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Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

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Expatriate Australian solar power company Ausra was one of the companies that featured heavily in my post on [concentrating solar thermal power](#) earlier in the year.

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has opened Ausra's first plant, a 5 MW CSP plant at Kimberlina in central California (the first to open in 20 years) which will generate enough electricity during peak hours to power 3,500 homes. Ausra's next plant will be a 177 MW plant nearby in San Luis Obispo County.

The [SMH](#) quoted Schwarzenegger as saying "This next generation solar power plant is further evidence that reliable, renewable and pollution-free technology is here to stay, and it will lead to more California homes and businesses powered by sunshine. Not only will this large-scale solar facility generate power to help us meet our renewable energy goals, it will also generate new jobs as California continues to pioneer clean-tech industry".

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Competitor Brightsource (backed by [Google](#), [Chevron](#) and [Goldman Sachs](#)) is building a number of similar installations that will total of 900MW, leading the way in a [real estate boom](#) in the Mojave desert.

[VentureBeat](#) points out that not all new plants will be in the larger size ranges, noting that companies like eSolar and Sopogy are looking at (relatively) small-scale solar thermal plants to generate steam for industrial processes. VentureBeat also notes the financial situation hasn't impacted existing plans for new CSP plants.

For the moment, it doesn't look like the credit crunch is delaying plans for larger, utility-scale deployments of 50MW and upward, at least according to what company execs have told me. Most plants haven't yet begun construction, and can spend time locating funding sources during permitting, while others have already secured debt or equity money to build. However, an extended recession could trim the number of plants that go online over the next four to five years.

[The Australian](#) reports that Ausra is lobbying the Australian government to introduce a feed in tariff which would allow the company to compete in the local electricity market.

Ausra Australia CEO Bob Matthews said the cost of the company's technology was on

par with gas-powered electricity generation in the US, where tariff incentives made renewable energy power production attractive. Mr Matthews has been lobbying government in Australia to introduce a feed-in tariff for renewable energy operators where they are given a guaranteed premium over the market rate for electricity.

"I have inquiries for projects equal to thousands of megawatts around Australia,' said Mr Matthews. "But other than the coal-fired projects and some off-grid applications I can't compete right now with black energy and there's no incentives in the system to level the playing field." While Ausra is based in the US and received first-round funding from US venture capitalists, its founder is expat solar energy pioneer David Mills. Part of the firm's \$US60.6 million second-round funding package comes from local venture capitalist Starfish Ventures.



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