

Australia greenlights \$19bn solar project to export power to Singapore

Australia-Asia Power Link is slated to provide up to 15 percent of city-state's energy needs once completed.

Australia's Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek [File: Sam Mooy/Getty Images]
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Australia has granted environmental approval for a \$19bn solar power project to export electricity to Singapore.

The Australia-Asia Power Link is slated to generate 6GW of renewable energy, one-third of which would be transmitted to the Southeast Asia city-state via an undersea cable.

SunCable, owned by billionaire software entrepreneur and climate activist Mike Cannon-Brookes, has said the project will supply up to 15 percent of Singapore's energy needs once completed in the early 2030s.

Australia's Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek said on Wednesday that the 12,000-hectare (29,650-acre) solar farm in the remote Northern Territory would create 14,300 jobs and transform Australia into a "renewable energy superpower".

“This massive project is a generation-defining piece of infrastructure. It will be the largest solar precinct in the world – and heralds Australia as the world leader in green energy,” Plibersek said in a statement.

Plibersek’s office said the approval came with “strict conditions” to protect the natural environment, including that the project must avoid the habitat of the greater bilby, a rabbit-like mammal considered vulnerable to extinction.

SunCable Managing Director Cameron Garnsworthy said the government’s decision was a vote of confidence in the project and the company as “responsible stewards of the local Northern Territory environment”.

“SunCable will now focus its efforts on the next stage of planning to advance the project towards a Final Investment Decision targeted by 2027,” Garnsworthy said in a statement.

Despite winning environmental approval in Australia, the project still faces various other regulatory hurdles, including assessments by authorities in Singapore and Indonesia.

The future of the project was thrown into doubt in January last year when SunCable went into voluntary administration amid a dispute between Cannon-Brookes and fellow billionaire backer Andrew Forrest over the direction of the company.