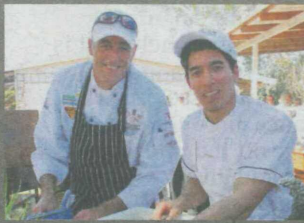




Tasty treat

Perth chefs enjoy local produce

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Family fun

Race club hosts special day

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Fishy return

Spring draws back the schools

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State gets solar votes

■ Claire Tyrrell

Natural energy advocates have used the Barnett Government's backflip on the solar feed-in tariff to renew their push for more solar installations in the Gascoyne.

Colin Barnett this month announced the State Government would decrease its contribution to solar producers who connect energy to the grid from 40 cents to 20 cents.

A massive voter backlash caused the Premier to reverse that decision just four days after it was announced.

Carnarvon's Lex Fullarton, who owns WA's first commercial solar farm, labelled the move as political posturing ahead of the Federal election.

"WA has phenomenal voting power, particularly in the mortgage belt of Hasluck where a lot of solar installations are," he said.

"A lot of people don't differentiate between State and Federal politics, so this would have caused people to vote against the Liberals in the upcoming election.

"All of a sudden the Liberals could have stood to lose 75,000 voters."

Solar installations in Carnarvon, Denham and Exmouth have been put on hold since as early as 2011, after energy provider Horizon Power announced the natural energy installations were at their full capacity.

Dr Fullarton said this simply was not good enough and more people should be allowed to connect to solar power.

"We were the first to fill up and it is actually shocking now that it has been more than two years and not much progress seems to have been made," he said.

"I know Horizon is trying and I know they didn't see it coming but with all due respect they should have."

Mining and Pastoral MLC Robin Chapple recently asked WA Energy Minister Peter Collier when Horizon Power would allow customers in the Gascoyne to connect renewable energy systems to the grid.

Mr Collier said the deployment



Carnarvon solar advocate Lex Fullarton has accused the Barnett Government of playing politics with renewable energy. Picture: Claire Tyrrell

of renewable energy generation in the majority of Gascoyne towns had saturated the network's capability to host any more renewable energy systems.

"The risks of creating network instability and power quality issues are now high," he said.

"Horizon Power is looking at

energy storage and demand side management options to mitigate these risks."

Mr Collier could not put a timeframe on when new connections might be permitted.

North West MLA Vince Catania welcomed Mr Barnett's backflip on the tariff scheme, but said the State

Government should allow Gascoyne residents to connect to solar power.

"It is good that Mr Barnett realised the impact it would've had on individuals who are trying to do the right thing by making sure they have renewable energy rather than relying on fossil fuels," he

said. "Now I call on the Government to go one step further and allow people in the Gascoyne to connect up more solar to the grids."

"The Gascoyne has got the highest take-up in solar and we should not be discouraged to do that, even though it may affect the bottom line of Horizon Power."

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