

'Green-power' Premier hooks up dirty generators

Diesel generators the Weatherill government is buying to prevent blackouts this summer ahead of the March state election have been connected to South Australia's wind-reliant grid.

Premier Jay Weatherill and Energy Minister Tom Koutsantonis yesterday toured the former Holden factory at Elizabeth in Adelaide's northern suburbs — one of two sites where the emergency generators have been installed. A second fleet of generators is at the Adelaide Desalination Plant in Lonsdale, south of the city.

Mr Weatherill said the state now had access to an extra 276MW of electricity generation, after weeks of installation and testing, which could be switched on with 12½ minutes' notice.

The new GE TM2500 aero derivative turbines will initially run only on diesel. The generators, which the state government is calling a "power plant", have been supplied by APR Energy and will ultimately be publicly owned.

Mr Weatherill confirmed the generators would operate on diesel during the next two summers, before being relocated to a central, permanent location as a state-owned power plant operating on gas. A permanent location is yet to be publicly identified.

The Premier claimed the generators would be "cleaner" than the former coal-fired Northern Power Station at Port Augusta and, once operating on gas, would be cleaner and more efficient than the gas-fired Torrens Island Power Station. He said the hybrid generators would be complemented by the world's largest lithium ion battery and new ministerial powers of direction.

APR Energy's bid was selected following a competitive

tendering process conducted by privately owned electricity distribution company SA Power Networks.

In August, *The Australian* reported the generators would use 80,000 litres of diesel an hour. The fleet of generators, which were shipped from Europe three months ago, will cost taxpayers more than \$300 million. However, Mr Weatherill and Mr Koutsantonis yesterday refused to detail the exact cost, claiming it was commercial-in-confidence. "It's within budget," the Premier said.

Asked yesterday how he reconciled using dirty diesel given his green-power agenda, Mr Weatherill said South Australia already generated 48.9 per cent of its power from renewable energy. "What this represents is our state-owned energy plant ... that will provide the long-term security for our energy future," he said.

The Premier said the state would use the generators to intervene in the market if private operators "misbehaved". "We would not hesitate to intervene in the public interest," he said.

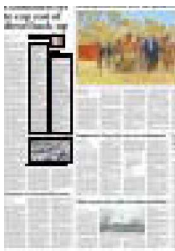
The opposition said the project showed the desperation of the government to prevent further blackouts before the next election.

"Labor is trying to bind any future government to an absolutely dodgy deal," Deputy Opposition Leader Vickie Chapman said.

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Weatherill



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The diesel generators at the former Holden factory