



Huge new coal plans

By Richard Schmeiszl

WONTHAGGI is set for a massive new industry, based on its dormant old coal mines, it was revealed last week.

A Sydney-based company, Clean Global Energy, is studying underground coal gasification, the first such project in Australia.

That would be on a 900sq km site, between Wonthaggi and Kongwak, an area still riddled with coal.

It is believed that the resultant energy could help power the desalination plant, among many other vital uses.

The project would involve a joint venture between Clean Global Energy and Greenpower Energy.

The result would provide dozens of jobs, and a huge regional investment, second only to the desal plant.

Wonthaggi is favoured over a Queensland site because of alleged groundwater contamination, on that

property.

Clean Global Energy was granted an exploration licence by the Victorian State Government, for a coal exploration area around Wonthaggi, two months ago.

A spokesperson said the sector contains many exploration and other wells.

"No drilling will occur before the company discusses plans with Bass Coast Shire council, affected landowners and the local community generally.

"That is a Clean Global Energy guarantee."

The spokesperson said a pilot plant would be built, depending on exploration results.

The form would "fully comply" with all government approval processes.

Up to 80 staff would be involved in building the plant, and about 200 following completion.

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That is apart from about 50 fulltime staff to run commercial operations.

The revolutionary process produces syngas (from synthesis gas), which has several key applications.

It can be used as a combination fuel for steam turbines such as the Latrobe Valley electricity generators, and to produce synthetic crude oil.

Syngas is also practical as a direct feed stock for gas turbine electricity generators.

Clean Global Energy's John Harkins said the best way to extract energy from coal seams is to slowly convert it into syngas.

"This is through a retractable injector, which provides oxygen to the coal," Mr Harkins said.

"Once a coal seam is consumed in one direc-

tion, the process can be repeated in another direction, using the same production well and gas treatment facility."

Clean work

Mr Harkins said there was no environmental damage.

"At the end of the process, all you are left with are a couple of holes in the ground," he said.

"The whole area looks just like it was before the work.

"Although underground coal gasification has long been successful overseas, the use of a retractable injector allows for much greater distances between production and injection wells.

"It makes the entire process cheaper, safer and easier to control."

A site decision is expected within months.

The project, however, would take "far longer" to

finalise.

A Clean Global Energy spokesperson said that "much planning and investigation" was needed, before work could begin.

That officer stressed that Wonthaggi was a promising site.

Bass Coast Shire mayor, Cr Peter Paul, was delighted with the news.

"This is the first I've heard about this," he said.

"The shire council would need to know much more before we could discuss it.

"However, the first details look very promising.

"Any major new industry with vast employment is most interesting.

"We look forward to learning more about it."

Further details will be available soon.

Wonthaggi's coal mines, the area's main employer for decades, closed in 1968.