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# Meet the surprising people behind Australia's renewable revolution

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As a **renewable energy export powerhouse**, Australia could boost our economy, create tens of thousands of new clean energy jobs and lower our domestic carbon pollution, improving the environment for all. Meet some of the Aussies leading the charge...

When Craig Johnston walked out of the Holden manufacturing plant in Elizabeth in South Australia, it was the end of an era. His much-loved place of work, where he had dedicated nearly 25 years of his life, had closed down. Craig finished up on a Friday, but when Monday morning came, he drove right back to the same place. He stepped back through the same door to oversee production of one of the world's most innovative renewable energy batteries.

**From Holden to hightech renewables**

Craig Johnston is now the Operations Supervisor at sonnen Australia, a global home battery manufacturer. After the Holden plant sadly closed down and with it a 70-year history of making the iconic Aussie car, sonnen setup its manufacturing facility and jumped at the chance to hire Craig and some of his former workmates.

"I was fortunate to work past the closure of the Holden plant and when it was time to leave, I left on a Friday, and started at sonnen on the following Monday," says Craig. "I haven't left the site and still see my old teammates, so in a way there's still contact with the Holden I know."

And it's certainly a place he knows well. "I started working for Holden just after school. Mum spent a bit of time here, and dad and my uncle worked here so I followed in the family footsteps I guess." But, there's another reason why this place means so much to Craig. "Funnily enough, it's where mum and dad met," he explains.



**Making the transition**

Craig hasn't missed a beat stepping into the rapidly growing world of renewables. "Every day has a new challenge, it's great to be here to learn new things," says Craig. "The auto manufacturing industry was very established and mature in contrast to cleantech manufacturing that is evolving and growing."

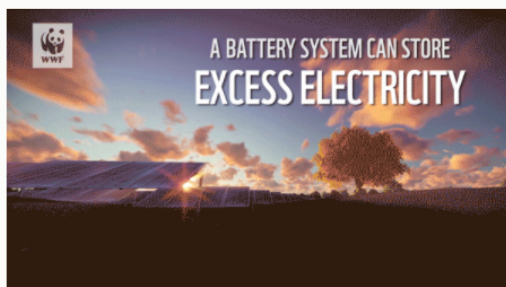
"I'm proud to be working in clean energy as Australia moves towards a future where more renewables power our electricity system. I am part of a workforce that is building home batteries that will power a clean energy future for Australians."

"By manufacturing locally, sonnen can help future generations with the jobs we've created in cleantech manufacturing," he says.

**Intelligent solar batteries**

The battery that Craig is talking about is the sonnenBatterie, an intelligent home battery system that allows households to store solar energy generated from their rooftop solar systems. When combined with solar panels, it allows households to draw on their own clean energy from their batteries and to reduce their reliance on grid electricity. This means that thousands of households across Australia can be energy independent and protected from energy price hikes with home batteries. The Elizabeth facility currently has the capacity to manufacture 10,000 batteries a year to meet the demand in Australia and abroad.

But according to Craig, the COVID crisis has highlighted the urgent need to strengthen Australia's manufacturing sector. "With everything that's happened in Australia as a result of COVID-19, it's shown us that we need to be self-sufficient when it comes to manufacturing, so we can get products without having to rely on a global supply chain," he says.



**Becoming a Renewables Nation**

The world is racing to grow their renewable industries. The ambition has never been greater. Australia has some of the best

renewable resources in the world but other global economies are investing at a rate far greater than us.

Australia's future prosperity relies on its unique renewable advantage. We have some of the best wind and solar resources in the world, abundant land and the critical minerals needed to make renewable energy technologies such as batteries. We also have the skills, expertise and strong trading relationships needed to develop a thriving clean energy export industry. However, Federal Government action is critical to unlocking Australia's natural renewable advantage, because currently we risk being outspent. WWF-Australia is calling on our leaders to make Australia the world's leading exporter of renewable energy by 2030. A massive expansion of Australia's renewable industry can power a new generation of exports we sell to the world, like batteries.

"With the government's support, we could help businesses like sonnen expand and export their products all over the globe, while creating new and exciting jobs across the country, including in regional Australia," said Nicky Ison, WWF-Australia's Energy Transition Manager.

"Australia has all the pre-conditions to capture the full value of the battery supply chain. In fact, experts say that Australia is one of only ten countries able to secure three-quarters of this global market."

"The global race for renewables is on and Australia has the opportunity to harness this opportunity and become renewable energy superpower," she says.

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#### Renewable energy superpower

CEO of sonnen Asia Pacific, Nathan Dunn, agrees that there's massive potential for Australia to become a **renewable energy export superpower**. "I think the shift or transition to renewables in Australia is important for everybody. Not just for business, but for consumers as well. We have the opportunity to create more jobs. Those jobs will not just be in the manufacture and sales of renewable energy resources, but they'll come from the flow on of additional installers and additional people driving trucks to move products. There's an opportunity for jobs at every step in the supply chain."

"It gives us an opportunity to be a battery manufacturing hub for the region. As an example of that, the sonnenBatterie systems that we're manufacturing here in South Australia have already started to be shipped offshore to markets like New Zealand. And we've also got a proposition around building our market in Southeast Asia," says Nathan.

#### People power

Tara Cooper, Head of People and Culture at sonnen Australia, says she has an immense sense of pride in being able to bring life back to the former Holden facility with new sonnen employees.

And she says there were very few challenges when it came to upskilling workers like Craig. "The new sonnen production team had received outstanding training in advanced manufacturing techniques through Holden," she explains.

"The production and warehousing skills they had already developed were easily transferable to produce and store batteries. We've also invested in developing additional electrotechnology skills through TAFE for employees who had more specialised roles in quality assurance and testing."

And it's not just about jobs in production and warehousing. Tara says they have also created new jobs in management, sales, marketing and customer service to support the business.

"We've found that there's a great depth of talent available within Australia to fulfil these manufacturing roles. There are plenty of people with the skills and desire to do the work right here."

#### Aussie-made clean energy future

Craig Johnston is just one of the many faces stepping up to lead Australia's renewable energy revolution. And of course, while he will never forget his beloved Holden days, he feels fortunate to be able to support his family by making what is fast becoming known as yet another iconic Aussie-made product – all while carrying on a proud family tradition.

"I hope this inspires Australians to consider a career in cleantech manufacturing and to think about how we can work together to build a clean energy future," he says. "We can create jobs for Australians, grow our economy and build a better future for everyone."

"I get to be a part of something bigger where clean energy and energy independence is changing the way we live. And it gives me the ability to sustain both me and my family's future" Craig says.

If Australia can take this moment in history to look forward and emerge from the COVID crisis as a renewable energy powerhouse, tens of thousands of Australians will be able to follow in Craig's footsteps.

That's a story any family would be proud of.

#### Find out more

WWF-Australia is calling on our leaders to make Australia the world's leading exporter of renewable energy by 2030. A massive expansion of Australia's renewable industry can power a new generation of exports we sell to the world.

Export products include renewable hydrogen-based fuels and direct solar power via undersea cables; renewable-powered commodities such as green steel and aluminium and components for renewable energy technology like batteries and wind turbines. We can export our expertise in engineering, business, legal and finance; and new hardware and software solutions for demand management, microgrids and the grid integration of renewables. There are huge opportunities to export education, training and the potential to create vast new onshore manufacturing industries and tens of thousands of jobs.

As part of this WWF is calling on governments to...

- Fund a Clean Recovery: match world leaders by committing at least 1% GDP to a clean recovery in the budget.
- Develop Bold Renewable Export Plans: that put us on a path to 700% renewable energy capacity.
- Create Renewable Energy Industrial Precincts: that enable industries to be powered by renewables and clean heat.
- Deliver a Fair Transition: ensuring First Nations, low-income households, workers and regional communities all benefit from the renewables race.

Find out more about how we can make Australia a Renewable Energy Export Superpower.

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