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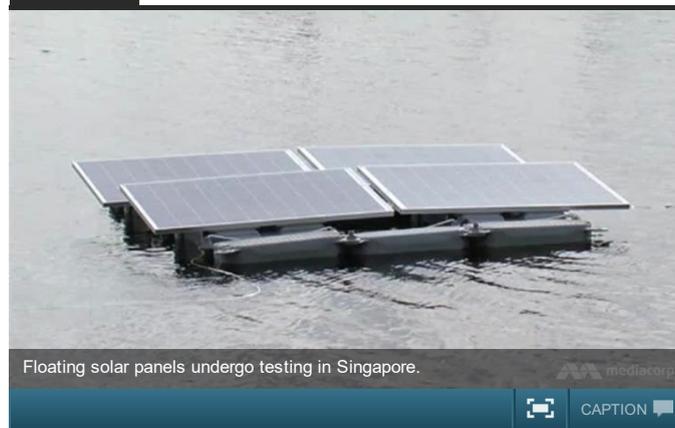
SINGAPORE

# Sunny future for solar panel research in Singapore

More solar companies are operating in Singapore in recent years, buoyed by Government investments into new technologies.

Posted 22 Aug 2015 14:47

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SINGAPORE: More people are tapping into energy from the sun, and the number of solar panel installations is set to increase. The industry is also warming up, with more solar companies operating in Singapore in recent years, buoyed by Government investments into new technologies.

Solar panels, usually seen on rooftops, could soon be a fixture on ponds and reservoirs too. A test at Bishan Park, which took place from March 2013 to December 2014, aims to make that a reality.

Mr Christophe Inglin, managing director of Phoenix Solar Singapore, said: "We wanted to see what additional requirements are there in terms of operation and maintenance. Water and electricity don't exactly mix, so extra precautions there. Would the pond life - pond weed, turtles, frogs - would they have an impact on the system?"

Each month, the panels generate enough electricity for the needs of a five-room HDB flat. The solar modules are manufactured in Singapore and donated by REC Modules.

HARSHER ENVIRONMENTS

In another study, the panels were tested in a harsher environment. Engineers wanted to find out if the panels would be affected by saltwater.



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Mr Steve O'Neil, CEO of REC Modules, said: "We studied things like the operating temperature of the solar panels, because the cooler the solar panel, the more energy you get out of it. So on water, with the cooling effect of the water, we actually get higher yields than you'll get on a rooftop or a land-based system."

The two companies will scale up their projects in a test bed at Tengeh Reservoir. The S\$11 million venture is led by the Economic Development Board and national water agency PUB, and managed by the Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore.

In the first phase, six consortia of companies will implement seven floating solar systems by 2016. By taking part in the project, the companies also benefit.

Mr Andre Nobre, the head of PV System Technology Group, Solar Energy Systems Cluster, Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore, said: "Most of the companies participating in the phase one test bed are local companies. They form consortia with foreign companies just to get some insights into the floating elements or the anchoring.

"They already have a lot of expertise deploying solar systems on rooftops across Singapore. They just needed that extra know-how on the floating elements."

In the next phase, two consortia will be selected to work on systems with larger capacities.

#### KEY PILOTING SITE

The project is one of several initiatives by the Government to boost the industry.

Mr Goh Chee Kiong, Executive Director, Clean Technology and Cities at the Economic Development Board, said: "Singapore is a convenient place for companies to develop, to pilot, and to commercialise innovative urban solutions in a real life setting, very often in collaboration with our Government agencies."

"With that living lab strategy, we want to avail piloting sites in Singapore to solar and energy management-related companies. (The) floating PV pilot therefore is one of our key piloting sites, where companies can hone their capabilities, and very importantly build their track records," he added.

In 2007, there were fewer than 10 solar companies operating in Singapore. Now, there are close to 50.

The number of solar panel installations has also grown. By the end of 2014, 30 megawatt-peak of solar capacity had been installed.

In 2015, projects with a scope of about 100 megawatts are expected to be finalised. This would contribute towards the country's goal, which is to raise the adoption of solar power to 350 megawatt-peak, by 2020. That would be about five per cent of peak electricity demand then.

- CNA/dl

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