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General News

By: Mathew Dunckley

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Victoria aims for smart grid

Mathew Dunckley

A supermarket car park, complete with electric car recharging points, and solar panel banks in suburban streets to handle peak energy demand are two of the landmark ideas in Victoria's bid for a \$100 million slice of a federal government energy efficiency fund.

Under the federal government's National Energy Efficiency Initiative, \$100 million will be granted to one demonstration project to develop a commercial-scale smart grid.

Victoria's Smart Grid, Smart City bid consortium members include power companies United Energy and Jemena, retailers AGL and Accenture, Frankston City Council, universities and consumer groups.

The bid centres on a project in the suburban bayside area of Frankston where, it is hoped, more than 10,000 residents could be hooked up to the so-called smart grid.

Energy and Resources Minister Peter Batchelor – whose government also supported the bid – said the project could see the local supermarket have charging stations for electric cars.

“Neighbourhood solar panels

could supply a local street with power in times of high energy demand, such as a hot summer's day, while software allowing homes to store electricity for air-conditioning in batteries would also be tested,” he said.

“Some households would be able to control home appliances remotely, with trials of mobile phone and internet applications allowing people to turn appliances on and off no matter where they are.”

The Victorian consortium is expected to face competition from at least Queensland and NSW.

United Energy chief executive Hugh Gleeson said restructuring the energy grid was a key challenge for the industry in response to climate change.

“We expect the patterns of electricity generation that we have to date always been so reliant on – coal-fired power stations centrally located – [to change],” he said.

“We will have a much greater distribution of generation be it solar panels on roofs or wind power.”

Mr Gleeson said the existing grid would need to change to take account of these changes and a desire for consumers to have more information about, and control

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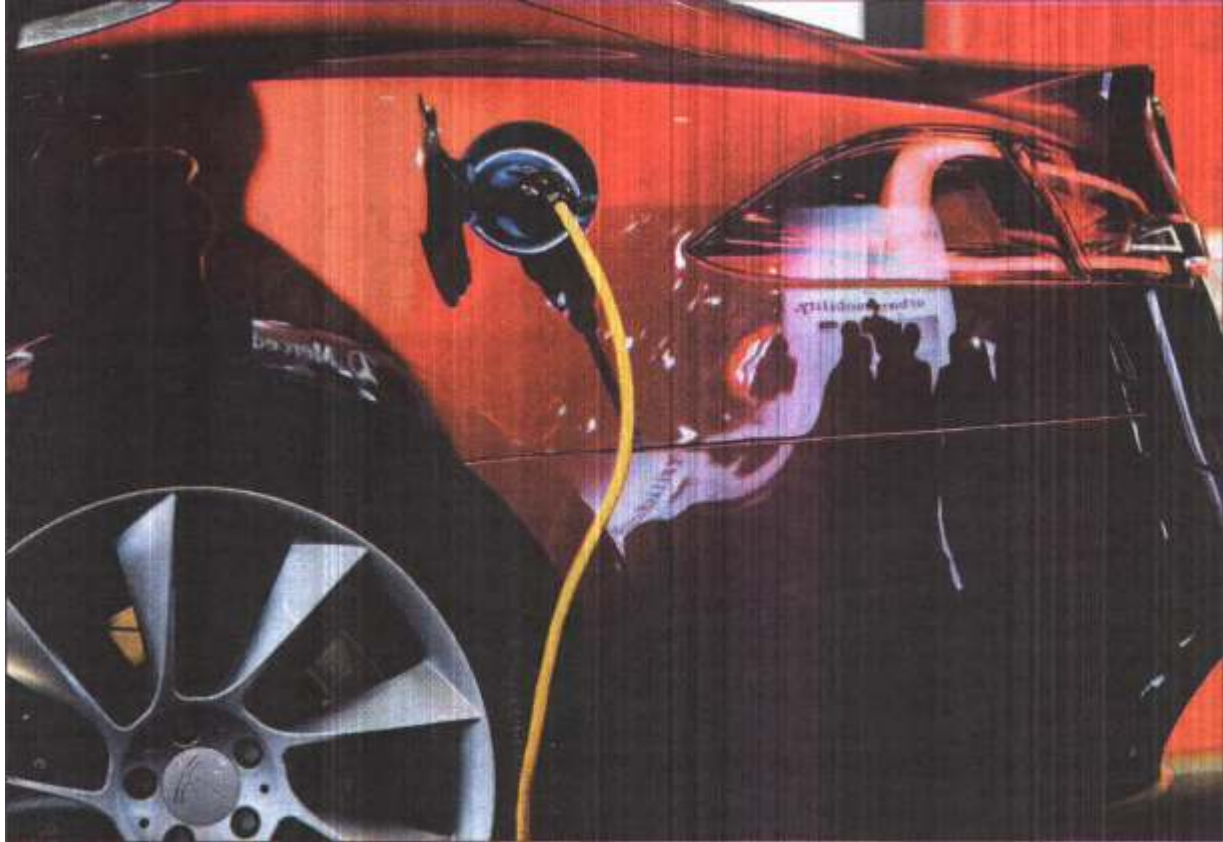
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The project could see charging stations for electric cars at the local supermarket.

Photo: REUTERS

Now we are talking of having the power flow in two directions.

Hugh Gleeson, United Energy

over, their consumption. "The networks themselves need to become more efficient," he said.

"In the past they have been a

fairly low level of technology and designs are pretty similar to what they were many, many years ago."

Mr Gleeson said in a standard modern grid, power effectively flowed only in one direction from the generator to the customer – and reversing that flow was a key challenge for smart grids.

"It all flows downhill, if you like, from the Latrobe Valley down into

the consumer's premises," he said.

"Now we are talking of having power flow in two directions from solar panels on roofs, for example [into the grid]."

Although the \$100 million was a welcome and sizeable investment, Mr Gleeson said the task of modernising the nation's grid would cost many billions of dollars over the coming years.