

# Biggest solar opportunities overseas - SESI

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Kate Barker - Thu, 28 May 2015



The biggest market for the country's solar industry is outside New Zealand, Sustainable Energy Services International director Tony Woods says.

Large projects being completed in this country are “not even on the radar overseas”, he told delegates at the Energy Management Association of New Zealand conference.

To land the big offshore contracts, SESI has sought to form partnerships with international firms, Woods says.

“If we can do that we open the door to other countries and we can be involved in those projects.”

Developments in solar over the past decade means some projects are now measured in gigawatts and billions of dollars, as opposed to megawatts and millions of dollars.

SESI worked to [install](#) a 1 MW, \$18.6 million off-grid system in the Bamyan province of Afghanistan in partnership with Alpine Energy subsidiary Infratec Renewables. The work began in 2012 and wrapped up late last year. Woods says that has helped lead SESI into work on larger projects.

He says future work will continue to be focused in countries where power generation is mainly sourced from oil and gas, such as parts of Africa and central Asia.

## Identifying markets

SESI was formed in the mid-1990s offering small-scale renewables to bach owners and farmers.

Woods says the firm soon realised that there was not enough of a market for that in New Zealand to run a company.

“We looked overseas and focused ourselves in the developing market where they had the demand and no power.”

He says the company found opportunities by “going to places where no one else wanted to go”.

The focus was also turned to markets that mainly rely on diesel for power generation, such as Tokelau, Niue and Samoa.

Aid funding has seen more New Zealand companies pick up solar contracts in the Pacific in recent years.

The Government has committed \$80 million to fund 25 renewables projects in the area. New Zealand is also contributing to \$635 million of grants and concessional loans that the European Union and other international donors pledged in 2013 at the Pacific Energy Summit in Auckland.

Woods says that as SESI undertook more projects in developing countries it found its clients expanding to include agencies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

The firm is now undertaking more on-grid projects that are larger but technically simpler. Woods says that work does sometimes involve the collision of the “very different cultures” in the solar and lines and transmission sectors.

“They need to be talking a bit more if we’re going to grow in the future.”

## Partnerships

The conference theme this year was 'acting global'. Woods spoke as part of the conference’s closing session, which was devoted to innovation around that theme.

He says that as the energy sector grows and diversifies, partnerships are essential to stay in the market. As SESI grew, Woods says they found themselves branching into industries that they didn't have any experience in.

Speaking earlier in the day, DETA Consulting director Jonathan Pooch said project partnerships can also help to add value for the customer.

His firm has recently been working with meat processor ANZCO on a large-scale energy management programme.

He told delegates that the only way to evolve beyond project-focused energy management and build it into a company's culture is to create wider partnerships.

Jade Software chief innovation officer John Ashcroft says that if firms are going to succeed when bidding for projects they must focus firmly on the specific requirements of the customer.

He says the world is moving to a post-industrial society, "which is defined by what it isn't".

"The one-size-fits-all approach is old and doesn't work anymore."