

Shadow on future of Sun centre

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WA'S United Nations-backed solar research centre could close next year unless the Federal Government changes its tune on renewable energy funding, industry sources have warned.

Also facing a funding crisis is the Perth-based "clever country" centre at Murdoch University, set up last year to develop commercial applications of greenhouse gas technologies.

The UN Centre for Applications of Solar Energy, or CASE, set up two years ago, is also based at Murdoch.

CASE director Gordon Thompson said continued federal funding was crucial to CASE, which was chosen by the UN Industrial Development Organisation as the international headquarters of a series of similar centres to curb fossil fuel reliance among developing nations.

He said it was lobbying the Howard Government to reinstate funding worth about \$500,000 a year. "The reception we have had recently in some areas has been more positive than we had 12 to 18 months ago," he said.

"But we're still without Commonwealth Government funding."

Until the Government, which has provided no money for the past two financial years, gives some indication about the structure of future funding, CASE would have to rely on some of the \$1 million set aside in its building fund to pay staff salaries.

The Budget abolition of the Energy Research Development Corporation also casts a big shadow over Murdoch's centre for renewable energy and greenhouse gas abatement technologies.

The ERDC has a seven-year funding contract of \$500,000 a year with the centre, which has an annual budget of about \$10 million to keep it going, though some projects would be scrapped or downgraded until the Government provided an alternative to ERDC's funding arrangements.

Although details are scant, the Government plans to reinstate ERDC under a new name and focus on energy efficiency rather than research and development that has helped many Australian companies sell their technologies worldwide.