

## SKM To Probe Geothermal Expansion Plan

**E**rgon Energy has appointed Sinclair Knight Merz to carry out a feasibility study into expanding its use of geothermal power generated at Birdsville in south west Queensland.

Birdsville is home to Australia's only geothermal power station, which uses hot water from the Great Artesian Basin to generate about a quarter of the town's electricity needs.

The study will investigate if the hot water resource can be used to supply all of the town's day-to-day power requirements and relegate the existing LPG and diesel-fuelled generators to be used only as back-up at peak times such as the annual Birdsville races.

Ergon Engineer David Smyth said geothermal energy was considered to be one of the most

exciting potential sources of renewable energy for Australia. "So far our small power station in Birdsville is the only one to tap this wonderful renewable, underground resource that provides totally clean, emission-free power", Smyth said.

"However the existing equipment is coming to the end of its working life, so we are keen to find out if it will be possible to upgrade to a new, more efficient model."

The study will assess things like the location and depth of a new bore, potential artesian water flow rate and temperature, electricity generating potential, potential impacts on the artesian basin and what kind of geothermal power station technology would be most appropriate and effective. The final report is due by the end of March. ■