

BMW supports bid for renewable energy

By [David Furlonger](#)

19 Oct 2015

BMW SA plans to use renewable sources for all its electricity needs within five years, said MD Tim Abbott at the official launch of a biogas project on Friday, 16 October.



The project will initially provide up to 30% of the car maker's power needs.

In a deal that could make the company as well-known for its "cow power" as for its cars' horsepower, BMW SA has signed a 10-year renewable energy agreement with Bio2Watt, which produces electricity from organic waste. The company's first commercial-scale facility, at Bronkhorstspuit, east of Pretoria, processes 500 tonnes of waste daily. Of that, about two-thirds is cattle manure and the remainder mixed organic waste. The plant is on the land of one of SA's biggest cattle feedlots. According to Beefcor, which owns it, the land can carry about 25,000 head of cattle.

The City of Tshwane, which has facilitated and encouraged the development, supplies other waste to the plant. The combined waste is fed into an on-site "digester" to produce biogas, a general name given to the mixture of gases produced by the breakdown of organic matter. The biogas then goes into a gas engine to make electricity, which is fed into the local power grid.

Though Bio2Watt is not supplying its electricity directly to BMW SA, the car maker's support makes the project viable.

"Without our weight, the project might not yet have been possible," Abbott said.

SA is home to about four million cattle and the technology's supporters say that if projects like these can prove their long-term viability, the potential for electricity generation is considerable. Abbott said Eskom's backing had also helped Bio2Watt get under way.

The biggest attraction of biogas-sourced electricity is that it reduces dependence on coal, on which traditional power stations rely for their energy. It also reduces the volumes of waste dumped in landfills. The Bronkhorstspuit plant has the capacity to generate 4.4MW, just over one-third of the current total requirements of BMW SA's Rosslyn assembly plant, which is about 70km away on the other side of Pretoria.

Abbott said he hoped his company could meet all its electricity needs from renewable sources by 2020. It had already spoken to Tshwane and Eskom about the feasibility of generating more power using methane from landfills close to Rosslyn. "They are keen to talk to us," he said. "The methane is already there. It's a matter of getting it to the plant."

Source: Business Day

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