



Australian Energy Storage Conference 2017: Where Batteries Met Barbies (The Aussie Way)

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Remember when energy storage was as exciting as watching paint dry? The Australian Energy Storage Conference 2017 changed that narrative faster than a kangaroo escaping a bushfire. Held in Sydney from May 23-24, this gathering of energy innovators became the Southern Hemisphere's Woodstock for battery geeks and grid revolutionaries.

Why This Conference Made Koalas Cheer

While most conferences serve lukewarm coffee and reheated PowerPoints, the 2017 edition delivered shockwaves (pun intended) through Australia's energy sector. Let's unpack why it still matters today:

- Record attendance: 1,200+ delegates from 30 countries - enough to fill Sydney Opera House twice over
- Commercial breakthroughs: 17 new battery storage products launched
- Policy fireworks: SA Premier Jay Weatherill dropped his state's "big battery" plan mid-conference

The Tesla Effect: When Musk Stole the Show (Without Showing Up)

Though absent physically, Elon Musk's "100-day battery installation guarantee" became the conference's running joke. Multiple speakers referenced it, including EnergyLab's founder who quipped: "We've timed this presentation to 99.9 days - just to be safe."

Real impact came through projects like:

- Neoen's Hornsdale Power Reserve (later dubbed "Tesla Big Battery")
- AGL's virtual power plant proposal
- Redflow's zinc-bromine flow battery demonstrations

Storage Solutions That Actually Worked in the Outback

Forget theoretical models - this conference specialized in real-world applications tougher than a vegemite sandwich. Western Power showcased their solar+storage microgrids that kept lights on during cyclones, while Bushlight International revealed how their systems powered remote clinics through 40°C heatwaves.

The Great Battery Bake-Off

Manufacturers competed in what delegates called "Battery Idol" - live stress tests simulating Australian conditions:

Challenge

Winner

Real-World Application

48h continuous discharge

LG Chem

Mine sites

Rapid 0-100% cycling

Sonnen

Frequency control

Policy Wars: When Ministers Threw Shade (Literally)

The panel debate between state energy ministers turned into what RenewEconomy called "a solar eclipse of political will". South Australia's advocacy for storage subsidies clashed with NSW's market-driven approach, while Victoria quietly took notes for their later battery tenders.

Key regulatory developments included:

First draft of AS/NZS 5139 safety standards

ARENA funding for 8 community battery projects

Clean Energy Council's new installation guidelines

The "Ute Test" That Changed Everything

Deloitte's presentation included a now-famous slide comparing battery costs to ute (pickup truck) prices. Their finding? "Soon you'll choose between a Tesla Powerwall or a new Holden in the driveway - and the Powerwall might improve your marriage." Laughter erupted, but the data proved prophetic - residential battery prices have since dropped 62%.

Innovations That Predicted 2020's Trends

This conference didn't just discuss current tech - it previewed the future like a Sydney NYE fireworks show:

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Vehicle-to-grid (V2G) trials: Nissan Leafs powering Melbourne suburbs

Blockchain trading: Power Ledger's pilot with 200 households

Hydrogen hybrids: ATCO's gas network conversion plans

ARENA CEO Ivor Frischknecht's warning still echoes: "Storage isn't the shiny new toy - it's the workboots of our energy transition. And Australians know a thing or two about good boots." From the debates over coffee (properly brewed, not instant) to the exhibition hall's battery beauty pageant, this conference proved storage could be both technically robust and commercially sexy.

The Flying Electrician Paradox

One breakout session revealed a curious fact: Australia's 2017 battery installers spent 23% of their time driving - enough to circle the continent 1.5 times weekly. This sparked innovation in remote monitoring tech that's now standard industry practice. As one installer joked: "I went into renewables to save the planet, not become a truckie!"

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