



Greener path for Melbourne

TESSA AKERMAN

The University of Melbourne has taken a \$9 million loan to finance energy-saving initiatives in a move that could prompt other universities to take steps towards boosting their sustainability efforts.

Melbourne's chief financial officer Allan Tait said the university had an obligation to show leadership in critical global issues such as climate change and sustainability and hoped to achieve carbon neutral status by 2030.

He said the suite of projects that would be undertaken using the Clean Energy Finance Corporation loan was a critical component of achieving the goal and was expected to deliver annual energy savings of \$900,000 and more than 9000 tonnes of carbon.

Mr Tait said the university would soon release its sustainability charter, which will state its principles in regard to sustainability while also identifying its commitments across its activities, from research, teaching and learning through to engagement, operations and governance.

Melbourne has been under intense pressure from students, staff and interest groups to divest its endowment from fossil fuel interests. The university has consistently maintained it does not directly invest in equities but is part of the Victorian Funds Management Corporation.

The \$9.1m provided by CEFC will be used across projects including installing voltage optimisation equipment and solar panels, and upgrading freezers in science and medical facilities to more energy-efficient models.

CEFC executive director Paul McCartney said the corporation was looking to work on similar projects with other universities and saw potential for the sector to increase its productivity and economic impact while reducing emis-

sions.

Australian Campuses Towards Sustainability president Leanne Denby said there was always

progress being made towards sustainability by universities.

"The problem is that it's a competing priority for executives," she pointed out.

Ms Denby said it was no secret that the sector was looking at ways to become more financially sustainable and outside funding sources would be key to big projects becoming greener.

Ms Denby, Macquarie University's director of sustainability, said universities were a place of innovation and exploration, and they should lead by example.

"But we also need to make sure that we are embedding the ethos of sustainability into the learning and teaching that we provide through the research that we conduct in how we respond to the big

challenges locally, nationally and globally.

"Because if universities don't take up that challenge, we're going to fall behind," she said.

Ms Denby said universities needed to meet the challenge set by multinationals, which were embedding sustainability as a core business strategy, and to provide students with sustainability skills.

She said while progress towards greater environmental sustainability may appear to have slowed, for those who work in the sector, it is always on the radar.

"The trouble is trying to justify it among all the other competing priorities. Our capacity to show the business case is something we really need to make sure we're clear and good at."

Melbourne has been under intense pressure to divest from fossil fuel interests



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The University of Melbourne's chief financial officer Allan Tait, left, and federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt next to solar panels at the university