

Local engineer plugs Solomons into power

HUNDREDS of embattled Solomon Islanders have been connected to cheap, reliable and green electricity thanks to the commitment of a Central Coast businessman and his wife.

Mechanical engineer Peter Lynch, who has started a company that makes hydro-electric turbine systems, has provided electricity to five villages in the war-torn nation.

Civil war and the hard slog to build his family a home have not quelled Mr Lynch's desire to help the hundreds of Solomon Islanders he met as an aid worker.

The Lynches have an office in their home at Way Way and a small factory in Honiara, where Mr Lynch single-handedly designs and constructs the turbine systems.

Yesterday, federal member for Robertson Jim Lloyd unveiled Mr Lynch's latest turbines, which look eight weeks to build and will provide power to 450 people in the village of Nairiao.

Mr Lynch said he was expecting the same reaction in Nairiao as in the other communities that now have power.

"There will be no screaming or celebration immediately but a pause, a time to reflect and stand in awe, then an eruption of celebratory joy," Mr Lynch said. "Life will never be the same - it will be better."

In remote areas, kerosene and diesel are used to supply power but both are expensive and crucial supplies have been hard to access during war time.

Life for the 400 students who board at Bula High School in Bulelavena village has been made easier with one of the turbines allowing them to freeze local fish rather than import canned products.



Gemma JONES

Students now do their homework under fluorescent lights.

Communities with turbines built by Mr Lynch's company, Pelena, were the only ones to maintain power throughout the civil war and Mr Lynch said the technology was creating jobs in poor communities.

Hydro-electric turbines have proven to be a lifeline in other third world communities, with one operating in Papua New Guinea and 15 in Indonesia.

Pelena turbines are installed in river systems near villages and use the water flow to create electricity, which is used for lighting, freezer systems to store food and to power local industry.

Mr Lynch's wife Salena said yesterday the family was committed to Solomon Islanders, having spent time there as aid workers, but said they were struggling to find funding to build the turbines, which cost thousands.

The family has won the support of Mr Lloyd, who said he was keen to see local small businesses succeed and acknowledged the risk and sacrifices the Lynches had made.

"Small business is the lifeblood of the Central Coast," Mr Lloyd said.

"It never ceases to amaze me that these small businesses export things like turbines to the world. I think we need to be shouting more about that."



Family business: Peter Lynch and wife Salena Bryce with their children Hugo and Matilda at the launch of the turbines for Nairiao yesterday. PHOTO: TOCC MARTIN JONES