At ANU, the preference is sunny side up

VISIT: Governor-General Michael Jeffery, left, with John Smeltink, from the Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems at the ANU. Picture: GRAHAM TIDY

By Tamara Glumac

Solar cells which scientists believe will slash the cost of solar electricity by 75 per cent and have significant implications for climate change policy were among the latest technology shown to Governor-General Michael Jeffery during a tour at the Australian National University yesterday.

Major-General Jeffery was taken through the university's solar research facilities including the laser laboratory, solar troughs and the Big Dish solar concentrator.

In his Australia Day address this year, General Jeffery spoke of global warming as "one of the most daunting environmental challenges".

"Mineral resources, including offshore oil and gas reserves, generate tens of billions of export dollars annually in an energy- and construction-hungry world," he said.

"But our mineral resources are not infinite.

"In particular, we need to encourage further research and development of alternative, safe, efficient and clean energy sources."

After that address, Major-General Jeffery contacted the ANU and was invited to take part in a tour of its solar research facilities, his spokesman said.

Yesterday, a host of scientists were on hand to explain technologies including the Sliver solar cell, which scientists believe will slash the cost of solar energy, making it competitive with wind energy, zero-emission coal and other clean energy technologies.

Research at ANU has shown the Sliver technology could achieve electricity costs below retail electricity costs within five years, given the right investment.

The technology has since been taken on by Origin Energy in Adelaide.

One of the brains behind the Sliver cell, Professor Andrew Blakers, said it would also have important implications for climate-change policy.

"It would eliminate the need for coal and reverse the growth of carbon dioxide emissions," he said.

"We have 1000 times more land than is required to provide all our electricity from solar cells worldwide."

Project engineer John Smeltink, from the Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems at ANU, showed General Jeffery a combined heat and power solar system.

"Basically, it uses a mirror which reflects light into a strip of solar cells," Mr Smeltink said.

"It reduces the cost of generating electricity and heat by focusing energy into smaller receiving elements."

Mr Smeltink said General Jeffery's visit had been a great opportunity to showcase renewable energy technology.