



Reflect on this

IT TAKES a couple of seconds to work out what's going on in this photo. You're looking at a pair of heliostat mirrors - sunflower-like reflectors that turn to track the sun during the day. These are just two of hundreds of thousands such mirrors arranged in the Mojave Desert in California, all part of the Ivanpah solar power project.

Their job is to concentrate the sun's rays onto boilers located on three central towers, turning water into steam that drives turbines. The site (inset) covers 14 square kilometres and will produce at least 377 megawatts of electricity, not much below the summer output of a typical nuclear power station in the US and enough to power 140,000 homes in California.

"It is like watching the creation of a huge piece of land art, a contemporary Nazca Lines of sorts," says photographer Jamey Stillings.

The project has been controversial. Native American groups have objected, claiming it will impact burial grounds. The project was also held up while desert tortoises - a threatened species - were relocated away from the Ivanpah site. It highlights the fact that even renewable energy projects can have some adverse environmental impacts.

"How do we balance the protection of select species of animals and plants at a specific site with the potential benefits of reducing our fossil fuel use through renewable energy production?" asks Stillings. Rowan Hooper



Photographer

Jamey Stillings

jameystillings.com