

Minutes of Ordinary Meeting - 10 December 2014

Agenda Item: E.3 Energy Innovation Co-operative: Community energy proposal

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In line with the Council Plan Principles, Council aims to reduce its emissions through the expansion of public and private clean energy generation. Council recognises that the recent community interest in renewable energy aligns with its commitment to sustainability through reduced emissions. It seeks to take a lead in exploring the potential for local Community Energy projects that will bring a number of benefits to the Bass Coast community. The establishment of one or more pilot projects will identify the shire as a leader in this area and has the potential to attract interest and subsequent economic development.

Therefore;

1. Council will participate as an equal partner in the Community Energy Project Working Group during 2014/15, working to explore the potential for local Community Energy projects and how Council can best contribute to this process.
2. Council will request further information to assist in better understanding the processes, governance and legality around developing community energy projects to develop a business case for budget allocations past 2014/15.
3. In participating in this Working Group Council aims to leverage broad expertise to help determine a maximum aspirational target for Renewable Energy generation across the shire.

Supporting Community Energy in Bass Coast through the development and roll-out of a 'Totally Renewable Towns' model

Policy statement

1. Support development of a 'Totally Renewable Towns' model in two areas of Bass Coast Shire, as a new approach to supporting place-based community-energy projects
2. Provide seed funding of \$50,000 per year for three years to develop and refine the model and leverage additional funding from other sources to roll the model out across the Shire, including development of community-owned renewable energy assets in each location

Introduction

This policy statement provides an updated approach to the one described in the Community Energy proposal submitted by the Energy Innovation Co-operative to Bass Coast Shire in December 2014. It provides a current view on how to better fulfil the strategic directions of the Natural Environment Strategy regarding Climate Change and Community Partnerships and specifically address:

- Strategy Objective 1.3.4 - Develop a knowledge base and networks to facilitate and support community energy initiatives.

Since 2015, the Energy Innovation Co-operative has undertaken several important initiatives that have developed important governance arrangements and considerable expertise for enabling community energy. These include:

1. Registering of a Public Fund with DGR status to receive tax deductible donations in support of community energy and a governing committee
2. Creation of the Southern CORE Fund as the public face of the DGR Fund that can provide no-interest loans and donations to support community energy, energy efficiency and community learning
3. The establishment of the first community energy project in Bass Coast Shire – the Old Energy – New Energy project at the State Coal Mine, Wonthaggi - with 91kW of solar and 42kWh of battery storage to provide energy needs to the site and receive income through a Power Purchase Agreement with Parks Victoria
4. Membership of the Victorian Community Solar Alliance with access to the Community Solar Portal and associated services and templates for managing community energy investment projects
5. The facilitation of a Totally Renewable Towns pilot in partnership with community groups on Phillip Island

In the two years since developing these most recent governance and operating systems we have raised over \$120,000 in donations and \$290,000 in grants towards establishment of the Old Energy New Energy project, support for four small community energy projects and the initiation of Totally Renewable Phillip Island. Initiatives 1 to 4 above are established or well underway and initiative 5 has been operating for six months.

A 'Totally Renewable Towns' model is an excellent approach for engaging community

The Energy Innovation Co-operative has learnt through our ten years of experience and considerable expertise held by our board members, that the best way of engaging community in new energy initiatives is by connecting with existing interest and adding value where it will benefit that interest most.

We have worked this way through the 100+ information and community learning events, workshops and projects we have run since 2009 and most recently through the Old Energy New Energy Project, Southern CORE Fund and Totally Renewable Phillip Island. In all these examples we first speak with people in each community to see what is of interest in the renewable energy or energy efficiency space and then tailor our activities to meet that interest. The Southern CORE Fund was borne out of our Active Hope event at Outtrim, with the Old Energy New Energy Project we worked with the Wonthaggi Seedbank, members of South Gippsland Conservation Society, Friends of the State Coal Mine, Bass Coast Community Foundation and Parks Victoria.

The Energy Innovation Co-operative believes that place-based, collaborative and adaptive governance is the best fit for facilitating these community energy initiatives.

On Phillip Island we approached and then collaborated with Boomerang Bags and Plastic-free Phillip Island and San Remo, PICAL, Phillip Island Conservation Society, Phillip Island Landcare Group and Bimbadeen Farm. Together we held a public meeting in June 2018 to garner community endorsement of the move towards a Totally Renewable Phillip Island. Since then we have applied the Collective Impact Framework to create a vision and a plan, and a collaborative governance structure to enable participants to contribute within subject-based working groups to first create and then achieve the plan's objectives. The Energy Innovation Co-operative is providing the services of the backbone organisation, as described in this Framework. We are doing this as volunteers as we have limited resources for this initiative.

The objectives for the 12 months from July 2018 from the Totally Renewable Phillip Island plan are:

1. Developing a combined method for measuring and profiling carbon emissions on Phillip Island. This initiative will build on existing carbon accounting processes currently being undertaken by Phillip Island Nature Parks, Westernport Water and Bass Coast Shire Council and draw on other frameworks used by communities such as Hepburn Shire.
2. Mapping community organisations on Phillip Island – what networks exist and what capacity and interest do people have to participate in or contribute to Totally Renewable Phillip Island?

3. Small energy efficiency and renewable projects supported by the BCSC feasibility funding and Southern CORE Revolving Fund.
4. Support the 'Pick-my-project' proposal already submitted for solar at the Cowes Childcare Centre
5. Document the soil carbon process used by the Davies, encourage more farmers to take up carbon farming practices and explore opportunities to pay them for offsetting emissions.
6. "It's all about food" event to showcase the opportunities for people to buy locally and compost waste. Possibly to be tied into the Phillip Island Food Festival
7. Electric Vehicle Event – possibly an EV Bus fieldtrip to the ATA's EV Expo in Melbourne
8. A Renewable Energy Schools event – TEDX style. There is a strong desire to involve school students early on in Totally Renewable Phillip Island.

The working groups that form the Totally Renewable Phillip Island collective are:

- Carbon Accounting
- Carbon Farming
- Clean Energy
- Communication and education
- Food and Waste
- Towards zero emissions transport

Each of these groups has their own plans of action to contribute to the overall vision and objectives. Where it makes sense to do so, existing organisations co-ordinate some of the group activities, for example the Phillip Island Landcare Group is co-ordinating Carbon Farming activities and the Energy Innovation Co-op is co-ordinating Clean Energy actions. This is to ensure we add value to current initiatives and utilise existing governance arrangements rather than duplicate or compete with them.

Important partnerships and relationships

The Energy Innovation Co-operative is well-networked with community energy groups throughout Victoria and Australia, including the Victorian Community Solar Alliance, particularly Geelong Sustainability, Moreland Energy Foundation and Bendigo Sustainability, Community Power Agency, Totally Renewable Yackandandah and Hepburn Shire Z-net. Through these and other relationships we have developed new partnerships with Mondo Power, AusNet Services and Co-operative Power Australia. We are also working on a partnership with Monash University to help with adapting the Shire-wide carbon profiling to a locality-based accounting system.

Closer to home we have partnered with Phillip Island Nature Parks and Vietnam Veterans Museum in a recent application to the Renewable Communities Program, along with 12 other smaller community groups, that will see over 700 kW of solar and battery

storage installed over the next two years if successful. To kick start this project we are facilitating a workshop with Ausnet Services to create a co-ordinated plan for adding more renewable energy and storage to the Phillip Island grid. This planned approach is to ensure the maximum benefit is derived for the community, including organisations and businesses on Phillip Island. Without a co-ordinated approach the risks are great, including grid instability, low returns for solar installations and exclusion of people on low income or renters.

In summing up why we think a place-based approach to working collaboratively and adaptively with communities to help them realise their renewable energy aspirations, we make the following points:

1. We engage communities through existing relationships and partnerships, adding value to community aspirations where it is beneficial for all to do so
2. We enable these communities to create their shared local vision for the projects they define
3. We draw on our networks and partnerships to assist with designing suitable renewable energy responses, utilising the best, proven technology
4. Working in this way across Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires will enable us to build a Renewable Energy Roadmap that collectivises our communities aspirations and presents a clear investment pathway for our new energy future
5. The benefits are shared because the community designs and co-ordinates the plan to best fit their needs. Each community will also design their governance arrangements, but we will consistently apply the Collective Impact Framework to facilitate this design and provide the backbone organisation services if needed
6. We will maximise existing governance structures in each community and utilise our own to add value when needed, for example the Southern CORE Fund for small community energy projects or the Co-op Board structures to create new business arrangements such as companies limited to facilitate community investment projects. Governance arrangements and legal structures will be negotiated for best fit with each place and each project.
7. Key partners are the interested community groups and businesses in each locality plus Bass Coast Community Foundation, Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shire Councils, Phillip Island Nature Parks, Westernport and South Gippsland Water, Parks Victoria, Mondo Power, AusNet Services, Co-operative Power Australia, Victorian Community Solar Alliance, Hepburn Z-Net, Totally Renewable Yackandandah, Monash University, Sustainability Victoria and DELWP.
8. Funding will be applied for from various sources, but as we develop the Renewable Energy Roadmap for the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shire areas we envisage applying for substantial funding through the Victorian State Government, ARENA and potentially the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.