

RAW Energy Community Conversation

Forum Report

A report on the community conversation convened by RAW Energy in Wodonga on 12 and 13 November 2015



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Twin Prism Consulting



Twin Prism Consulting

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Introduction

Renewable Albury Wodonga Energy (RAW Energy) is a group of active citizens working to increase the uptake of renewable energy in Albury Wodonga.

RAW Energy believes that our community can develop renewable energy projects that will reduce reliance on fossil fuels and provide an economic, social and environmental advantage to our community.

Therefore, the RAW Energy Vision is:

Locally generated renewable energy meeting community needs

Our current focus is to:

Bring partners together to develop renewable energy projects in Albury Wodonga

With the support of Wodonga Council, Albury City and the local Chambers of Commerce, RAW Energy convened a community conversation in November 2015 to further our aim of connecting households, community groups and businesses to local renewable energy projects, and to drive growth in the generation of renewable energy in the region.

The community conversation was held at The Cube, Wodonga on Thursday 12 November from 6-8pm and Friday 13 November at the Huon Hill Hotel from 7:30-9am. The agenda for each session is provided in Appendix 1.

The objective of the conversations was to discover if the community was interested in such projects and if so, what they might look like. It was also hoped that people would be willing to assist with the process.

52 people attended on Thursday and 20 attended on Friday.

Rob Carolane, principal consultant with Twin Prism Consulting, facilitated both sessions.

Highlights of the presentations and community feedback from Thursday evening and information gathered from the attendees in the morning session are provided on the following pages.

Thursday evening outcomes

Welcome

Cr Rodney Wangman, Mayor of Wodonga, welcomed participants to the forum and highlighted the support of local government on both sides of the border for this initiative.

Background

Bobbi McKibbin, a member of RAW Energy leadership group, spoke on the RAW Energy journey so far and highlighted the need for a whole-of-community approach (Albury and Wodonga together) and the logic of producing power close to its point of use. Bobbi invited more people to become involved, bringing a shared passion and skills to drive change in the development of local community energy projects.

Local Activity

Matthew Charles-Jones is a foundation member of Totally Renewable Yackandandah (TRY), a community group with the aim of making their community operate on 100% renewable power by 2022. He spoke about the Yackandandah journey.

Matthew highlighted the research TRY have done to understand their community's attitudes to solar power (90% of surveyed people are supportive). He also noted the high level of uptake of domestic rooftop solar power in Yackandandah (34% compared with a national average of 14%).

Matthew highlighted his personal motivation to be active in encouraging renewable energy, asking people to consider the question "What to tell the newborn child?" about our efforts to be responsible.

The importance of working with intent, over time, and recognising the community, technical and financial aspects of renewable energy projects was emphasised. Organisations such as Yackandandah Health working with TRY in developing a solar energy installation on their buildings are a measure of growing credibility.

Matthew concluded his presentation by highlighting a comment from a young member of the Yackandandah community about the activities of TRY. The young person noted that finally it seemed "Adults are taking my future seriously."

Australian Activity

Tarryn Lane, a foundation member of the Australian Wind Alliance and founding adviser to the Coalition for Community Energy. She is employed by Embark Australia and Hepburn Wind. Tarryn spoke to the forum on community energy activities happening across Australia.

Tarryn highlighted that activities were happening around the globe as local responses to global issues, and that community energy projects harness the skills and capital within a community.

Tarryn identified that the benefits of community energy flow back to communities by returning profits, both as return on investment and grants to community projects, and through purchasing practices and employment of locals.

She also highlighted that community energy projects have a "Rubik's cube" of interacting factors that need to be solved. These include social, technical, regulatory, governance, and capital aspects of a project. Typically, profitability from the enterprise can be measured in financial, social and environmental benefits.

Tarryn identified an important aspect of the 'culture' of sharing and supporting that exists in the community energy sector and that good advice is freely available. The wiki at www.embark.com.au was given as an example of a publicly accessible source of quality information on community energy.

Tarryn also spoke about a number of risks that face the community energy sector. These include the need for policy reform, political attitudes, economic challenges and the fact that it takes time to conceive and develop projects and achieve profitability.

Financial Aspects

Martin May is a former director of Hepburn Wind and has 30 years' experience as an executive in financial markets and fund management. Martin spoke about some of the financial aspects of community energy.

Martin began by highlighting the 'seductive' nature of community energy projects and the need to resist this to ensure wise financial decisions are made. He also highlighted that the skills to develop projects are available in every community.

Martin spoke at some length on the challenges facing community energy projects on a number levels and noted that generally the financial performance of projects has been disappointing. He spoke with particular reference to his knowledge of and involvement with the Hepburn Wind project.

He emphasized that, quite apart from the other benefits of community energy, the capital investment should be rewarded financially.

Martin expressed the view that there is a need for larger scale projects to become financially viable and that the retail side of the Victorian market is currently limiting possibilities.

Questions to Panel

Following the presentations, questions from the floor were addressed to the speakers.

Questions were about funding models, ownership models, and the current regulatory environment for community energy projects.

In summary, the answers provided by the panel indicated that there are a range of options for funding and ownership, and that options need to be explored and matched to individual projects. One of the aims of the conversations was the formation of a foundation group that will make decisions about local options.

The regulatory environment is changing, and options for retailing and billing (including virtual net metering) are developing that will allow purchasing power direct from the turbine/generator.

Community Feedback on Options

Following the formal part of the evening, attendees were invited to provide their thoughts on a range of community energy projects that RAW Energy could consider in the near future.

The purpose of the survey was to gauge community understanding of the possibilities and perceived opportunities and concerns of each option.

Option 1 - A community-funded solar farm selling energy to the grid

14 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
7	6		1		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership (community) • Builds community solidarity • To educate for the further generations to benefit • Real solid, nuts and bolts action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money to fund • Lack of education into having solar installed onto a roof and the cost • Problem will be getting a reasonable payment per kwh

Option 2 - Facilitate funding and installations of solar projects on community buildings

14 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
9	5				

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happening already • Good community ownership • Continue to happen • Community benefits exponential • Very visible • Education <u>for</u> Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate interest • For the community to understand the benefits, i.e. saving, renewable energy benefits

Option 3 - Support for businesses to invest in rooftop solar projects

15 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
6	5	1	3		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct to support that already exists maybe? • Education <u>for</u> Sustainability • Yes (4 ticks) • Have you considered schools under this? Please do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But many businesses are tenants in their premises • May be complex

Option 4 - Support for households to achieve greater energy efficiency

15 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
8	4	2	1		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting point a great basis for anyone to do with support for minimal output lots of gain Fundamental, lots of tools already exist – maybe just direct Serves same purpose as reduction Education <u>for</u> Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There have been so many attempts by government for this Government doesn't have consistent long term goals that show the benefit of renewable energy There has been lots of this already

Option 5 - Support for new subdivisions to include rooftop solar electricity

12 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
7	2	1	2		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can it be compulsory? Legally compulsory backed by government tax exemptions The developer should get some economies of scale Very visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement yes

Option 6 - Assist the rental market to achieve energy efficiency measures

16 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
7	7	2	1		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help them feel empowered (often feel they can't!) Large % of population is a valuable target Can be indirect support Education <u>for</u> Sustainability Very important to engage with rental properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perhaps a hard task and cost for public housing Would struggle to raise community funding for this but could be a co-operative project with Tenants Association

Option 7 - A community fund to invest in solar energy projects

18 responses

I love this idea	I like this idea	I can see this is alright	I don't think this is OK	I loathe this idea	I'm confused about this
9	5	3	1		

Strengths & Opportunities	Concerns & Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community to feel that we are investing in the new generation/s Need to be transparent, open and efficient in investing not little bits here and there with lots of admin Education <u>for</u> Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be hard to pick the right project Probably a very long road to achieve this

Graffiti Wall

Attendees were also invited to make any contributions they wished on a 'Graffiti Wall'.

These comments were provided:

- Leverage conscious business/B. Corps.
- Involve schools/reach out and encourage reduced consumption and renewable energy!

Friday morning outcomes

The Friday morning session had approximately 20 attendees (including Cathy McGowan MHR AO) and commenced at 7:30am. A working breakfast was provided.

The session began with a synopsis of the Thursday evening presentations and then a presentation by Alison Wiltshire from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).

ARENA

Alison Wiltshire is the Business Development Manager for ARENA. She presented an overview of ARENA and their five priority areas.

In the community energy space, ARENA are supporting activities that reduce project development costs, develop innovative business and financing models, or build self-reliance within the community energy sector.

A major focus is to help bridge the investment gap and reduce investment risk, and address barriers for projects with real market prospects in the short to medium term.

Facilitated Discussion – Where to from here?

Participants were then invited to form small groups to discuss three critical questions to guide future activities for RAW Energy.

The questions posed were:

- What should the next step be?
- Who will take it?
- What will your part be?

The following responses were provided and reported to the whole group in a plenary feedback session.

Group 1

Community Engagement

- Define a renewable energy policy for greater community of Albury Wodonga

Renewable trial combining with grid partner AusNet Services and ARENA

- Community grids building resilience in communities

Group 2

What should the next step be?

Study and research

- What currently is happening in renewable energy in Wodonga;
 - Who does what?
 - What is the size of this space?
- What are the total energy requirements for Wodonga (maximum energy usage)?
- Collect data to determine the most efficient renewable energy method for our region
- Increase the take-up level of renewable energy in Wodonga from 20% to 50%
- Investigate what works elsewhere, similar to Wodonga. Link in with other cities who have undertaken this journey

Who will take this step?

- Seek community membership, media, workshops to gather like-minded people to progress this space
- Council plan action created by community. Renewable energy targets 2016 - 2020

What will your part be?

- Peter McLarty involved

Group 3

What should the next step be?

Bill Busters (Dennis Ginnivan, Marion Steele)

Cheap/free advice about energy options, education and access to strategies based on good information

Take this to other communities

Who will take this step?

V4I (Voices for Indi) to assist process of getting groups in

Conclusion

Approximately 70 people engaged in a rich discussion convened by RAW Energy on the topic of developing renewable energy projects in Albury Wodonga.

While no concrete proposals emerged from the discussion, knowledge has increased and contacts have been made between local people on this emerging topic.

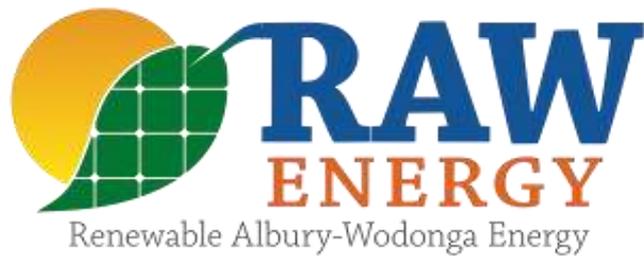
The RAW Energy team will consider this report and the new contacts made as they consider the next steps for RAW Energy.

Post Script - 'Where to from here'

RAW energy will provide feedback to all participants and interested parties who could not attend these events to reignite interest in community energy locally in 2016 with the initial purposes of:

- Calling regular meetings to keep the momentum going in driving a focus to potential project(s) that would enable RAW energy to get some 'Runs on the board';
- Highlighting the Victorian government funding opportunities and potential for partnership and;
- Continuing to advocate community renewable energy projects through email, social media and other forms of available communication through local partnerships.

Appendix 1 – Agenda



IDENTIFY
key community
and business
partners

IDENTIFY
Projects

INCREASE
share of
renewable
energy locally

PROMOTE
Renewables



Community Energy Conversation

Thursday, November 12, 2015

5.45pm for a 6pm start
The Cube Wodonga

Program

- 5.45pm** Registration and refreshments
- 6pm** Welcome – Wodonga Mayor, Cr Rodney Wangman
- 6.05pm** What's this conversation about? Rob Carolane
- 6.10pm** An introduction to RAW Energy – Bobbi McKibbin
- 6.20pm** TRY (Totally Renewable Yackandandah) – Matthew Charles-Jones
- 6.45pm** Successes around Australia – Taryn Lane
- 7.10pm** The finance questions – Martin May
- 7.35pm** Questions to the panel and what's next? – Rob Carolane
- 8pm** Wrap-up and invitation to breakfast

Friday, November 13, 2015

7am to 9am
Huon Hill Hotel, Wodonga

Breakfast Program

- 7am** Breakfast available
- 7.30am** Welcome and recap of community conversation – Rob Carolane
- 7.45am** ARENA – other Australian projects and opportunities – Alison Wiltshire (Australian Renewable Energy Agency)
- 8am** Facilitated discussion – Where to from here? Targeting project/s – Rob Carolane to facilitate
- 8.40am** Feedback, next steps, close 9am

RAW

Who is RAW energy?

Renewable Albury-Wodonga (RAW) Energy is a new community-based group that seeks to connect households, community groups and business to local renewable energy projects, and to drive growth in the generation of renewable energy in the region.

Taryn Lane

Taryn Lane works for Embark Australia, a not-for-profit set up to kick start the community energy sector in Australia. Through that she supports other communities to build their own renewable energy projects for the benefit of their communities.

Taryn has also worked for Australia's first community-owned co-operative wind farm Hebburn Wind for five years thus far, delivering industry best community engagement around wind energy.

Taryn is a founding director of the Australian Wind Alliance, a founding advisor to the Coalition for Community Energy and holds a BA in International Studies and a MA in Sustainability and Social Change.

Martin May

Martin has extensive experience in the corporate and community sectors. For more than 30 years Martin held executive positions in financial markets and funds management businesses in Australia and New York. He spent eight years working for Challenger International and as a director of Challenger Life, a specialist provider of retirement income streams before managing a commercial mortgage trust.

Martin was a director of Hebburn Wind for four years and the treasurer during the final capital raising, construction and commissioning of the wind farm. Martin resigned as a director in 2012. More recently, Martin has focussed on the community energy sector and worked with several groups looking to emulate the example of Hebburn Wind.

Martin is married with two adult children and spends his time in Melbourne and Daylesford, where he and his family have owned a house for the past 16 years.

Matthew Charles-Jones

Along with being a foundation member of Totally Renewable Yackandandah, Matthew is a passionate advocate for community renewal, particularly in relation to local economies and sustainable practice. During 2014, Matthew worked for Indigo Shire focusing on energy policy and opportunities.

Having been fortunate to have grown up on the peaceful banks of the Kiewa Valley, Matthew developed a passion for the outdoors and the ways in which humans engage with the natural world. More recently Matthew and his wife have built a straw bale house in Yackandandah which generates more power than it uses and sports a composting toilet.



For more information visit our Facebook page 'Renewable Albury-Wodonga', LinkedIn or email renewablealburywodonga@gmail.com

Key partners and stakeholders

RAW Energy is grateful to Wodonga Council for assisting with the hosting of the community conversation and to Wodonga Council, AlburyCity and the local chambers of commerce for promoting the event. If your organisation can assist with advice, sponsorship, business links or promotion please email details to renewablealburywodonga@gmail.com