

# Renewable Energy Benalla

## Annual Report for Benalla Sustainable Future Group 2022 AGM

Covid lockdowns and restrictions have had a significant impact on the work of Renewable Energy Benalla (REB), particularly in relation to meetings and conducting any workshop activities. Implementing the Benalla Stationary Energy Transition Strategy developed in 2017 with assistance from Beyond Zero Emissions continues to be the major goal of REB. This strategy has the goal of achieving 100% renewables by 2028.

### Benalla Community Energy Project

The establishment of the Benalla Community Energy Project working group as a sub group of REB has been very successful. The goal of this working group was to establish a donation based Community Energy Fund, managed as a separate BSFG bank account, which makes interest free loans to community buildings to install solar panels or conduct other energy efficiency measures. Loan repayments by the community group to the fund are based on savings on energy bills. These repayments eventually enable funding of another system and the fund becomes a 'revolving fund'.

The Community Energy Project working group approached two Benalla kindergartens who accepted the offer of interest free loans to install solar panels. Panels were installed at Munro Ave kindergarten in May 2021 and Bernard Briggs kindergarten in late January this year. Grants from the Winton Solar Farm Community Benefit Scheme assisted with funding both these projects. The solar installer, Solargain, made significant in-kind contributions to both projects and have indicated that they are willing to assist REB in future projects. Loan repayments from both kindergartens are rebuilding the balance of the fund. The working group will now work towards identifying potential future projects to fund.

### Energy Efficiency

Due to Covid we have been unable to conduct Energy Efficiency workshops during the last two years. While the 2019 workshops were seen to be excellent by those who attended, the number of participants was disappointing. Improving energy efficiency, and therefore reducing energy use, is a major focus of the Transition Strategy and we need to focus on how to best promote this.

### Community Power Hub

A joint initiative from Goulburn Valley Community Energy and Indigo Power has resulted in the establishment of the Hume Community Power Hub. The Victorian government has established a number of such Hubs across the state and has provided them with significant funding. The purpose of the Hume Community Power Hub is to increase the deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects across the Hume Region. In order to do this the Hume Community Power Hub will build the capacity of the North East Community Energy Network and its members.

REB is a member of this network, which is the largest community energy network in Australia. Kevin Smith is the REB/BSFG representative on this group.

BSGF obtained funding from the Hume Community Power Hub to conduct information sessions for landlords about the advantages of installing solar panels on their properties to enable renters to have access to cheaper electricity bills.

### Future of REB

REB has been struggling for some time due largely to a lack of active members and the future of REB has been discussed at several REB meetings. The Community Energy Project working group had been meeting independently of REB but in November we held a joint meeting to discuss the future of REB. It was decided that the groups should combine. This should overcome some of the problems that REB has been having.

As a result of the BSFG Review process some new members have joined REB and this should also help.

Renewable Energy Benalla was established as an action group of BSFG in 2017, following a very successful public forum in October 2016 on 'Future Energy for Benalla'. After five years as Convenor this report will be my final involvement with REB as I am moving away from Benalla very shortly.

John Lloyd  
June 2022