

Renewable Energy Benalla (REB) Report to BSGF, September 2021

Benalla Community Energy Project

The Benalla Community Energy Project working group is a sub-committee of Renewable Energy Benalla. This group has established a donation based revolving fund to install solar panels, or undertake energy efficiency upgrades, on community facilities in and around Benalla.

We were able to undertake our first project, the installation of solar panels on Munro Ave kindergarten, without conducting a fund raising program, as we obtained a grant from the Winton Solar Farm Community Benefit program, together with significant contributions from Sandy Campbell and SolarGain.

Following installation of the panels we conducted an official 'switch-on' ceremony where Dr Helen Haines, the Independent Member for Indi, launched the Benalla Community Energy Project.

BSGF has said that they are willing to fund our second project which will be installing panels on Bernard Briggs kindergarten, so once again we will not need to conduct a fund raising program.

We have asked the kindergarten management group to obtain a quote for an appropriate system.

Winton Solar Farm has informed BSGF that they would welcome another application for a Community Benefit Grant to fund a further project. The second round of grants should open shortly.

While we have not needed to conduct a fund raising program to date, it is something that the working group will need to focus on in coming months, to fund further projects. Rustic café has a donation box and they have promised to donate monies collected to the community energy project.

Action Groups

1. Waste to Energy

Adrian Howden is continuing to investigate the possibility of establishing a waste to energy project in Benalla that could serve the region. Such a project will need to be totally supported by Council. There has been some initial contact with Council but much more consultation will be needed.

2. Solar Garden

Kevin Smith has been investigating Solar Gardens with the ultimate aim of establishing one in Benalla. A 'solar garden' is like a small solar farm where households unable to install solar panels (e.g. renters) can buy a 'plot' of panels and receive an annual credit against their energy bills for the energy it produces.

Kevin is waiting to receive detailed planning advice from the Haystacks Solar Garden Project in northern NSW. Council support would be essential for such a project, including land to develop a solar garden.

3. Energy Efficiency

We have not conducted any energy efficiency sessions since 2019. This has largely been due to COVID restrictions but we also need to work out how to attract more participants. There has been some discussion about moving to online presentations.

4. Community Engagement

In order to improve our community engagement some planning was done to conduct a renewable energy expo, however the COVID situation makes it difficult to plan and conduct such events. This may be possible in 2022.

Transition Strategy

The Benalla Stationary Energy Transition Strategy which was developed with support from Beyond Zero Emissions details appropriate strategies to achieve our goal of 100% renewables by 2028. However this is a complex task and while REB has managed to work on some of the strategies outlined in the Transition Strategy document we urgently need more people to join us to help us achieve our goal.

Future of Renewable Energy Benalla

REB has been struggling for some time, largely due to a lack of active members. This has led to some discussion about the future of REB. A number of suggestions were made at our recent meeting, and these will be carefully considered at our October meeting.

REB Convenor

There will shortly be a need for a new Convenor, as we will be selling our house and moving away from Benalla by the end of the year.