

HEPBURN SHIRE COUNCIL

CARBON FREE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS & CARBON FREE ACTION WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

During 2017, Hepburn Shire Council held four Carbon Free Community Conversations and a follow up Carbon Free Action Workshop. The intention was to gauge the commitment of localities and towns across Hepburn Shire to becoming carbon neutral. At these sessions members of the community had discussions on topics such as:

- How carbon neutrality could be achieved
- Who could/should be involved
- Potential projects, programs or technologies
- Potential obstacles and methods to overcome them
- What role Council, industry and community should play

The following report outlines the project details and outcomes.

KEY ACTIVITIES

The key project activities included:

- Conducting professionally facilitated community conversation sessions across the Shire.

Community Conversation sessions were held in four townships across Hepburn Shire in June 2017 (Clunes, Creswick, Daylesford and Trentham). At these sessions community members discussed a number of concepts and potential actions.

An additional Carbon Free Action Workshop was held in October 2017, which brought together the concepts that had emerged from the initial consultations. The workshop also included presentations by subject experts and representatives of other communities that were attempting to reduce their emissions.

- Documenting the ideas which were put forward at community sessions, with the intention of using these to guide future incentives.
- Feedback was then provided to participants and the broader local community on the outcomes of the community conversations via email, social media and website.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Hepburn Shire Council held these sessions to support communities in identifying potential pathways towards carbon neutrality. The aim was to initiate and support community led action to achieve energy resilience through education, energy usage reduction and local

renewable energy solutions. The ultimate desired outcome was to achieve targeted goals which would help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

After the completion of these sessions, it was identified that the key outcomes of the process should include:

- Developing a sustainable energy focussed community committee for Hepburn Shire, which will be supported by Council. It was proposed that this committee should include Council, business and community representation. It was also proposed that what is agreed upon by the committee should not be binding; rather that the aim should be to provide a forum for discussion and networking.
- Progressing the development of a 'Hepburn Energy Fund'. This would also include the development of a framework which delivers sound finance and business models and realistic financial benefits. It was identified that this process could also assist in the development of a decision tree and pipeline for community projects and initiatives.
- Identifying and engaging people who are influencers and can provide leadership within the community, business sector, government and energy sector. Skills and potential partnership opportunities should also be identified and built upon where possible.
- Rollout and promotion of programs within the Shire which can assist in setting targets and demonstrating action. Programs which the community can support and become involved with such as Hepburn Solar Bulk Buy (HSBB) and Zero Net Energy Town (Z-NET) are strong examples of this.
- Review other community projects that have already undertaken a business case assessment or have progressed, in order to learn from them. Equally, efforts should be made to develop case studies around programs within the Shire, in order to provide support and examples for other communities to follow.

Hepburn Shire Council is working with community to achieve these outcomes. The Z-NET pilot program is currently being rolled out within the Shire, which is also delivering many of the desired outcomes identified in the Conversations and Workshop. This program is currently Council backed, and Council will continue supporting the project throughout its initial phase and into the future. Key tangible outcomes of the Z-NET program tie in well with the desired outcomes from the Conversation sessions. Z-NET deliverables which address the afore-mentioned points, both in the initial project phase and beyond include:

- Establishment of a Community Advisory Panel for the initial stage of the program. It is envisaged that this Panel will then evolve into a more formal Round Table, as was an identified outcome at the Community Sessions.
- Assessment of ideas put forward by community, in order deliver feasibility and/or business case feedback. Moving forward, it is anticipated that an initial assessment of ideas can be provided by experienced persons involved with the Round Table. Projects identified as viable can then be assessed further by consultants as necessary

- The Community Advisory Panel selection process aims to identify and engage individuals with the skills and attributes necessary to advance the community's goals. It is envisaged that the number of engaged individuals would further increase in future.
- Programs occurring within the Shire and surrounds are already working in together well. Engagement with all stakeholders, particularly community, is a key strength of these projects. This collaborative approach is supported by Council and will be further strengthened by the establishment of a community Round Table.
- The knowledge gained through the Z-NET program will be documented and shared. This mutual knowledge sharing and cooperation will be further strengthened in future through the adoption of forums, ongoing discussions, education and guidance.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The project was undertaken by Hepburn Shire Council with the assistance of Jennifer Dickson from Uncommon Knowledge, who provided professional facilitation services for all the sessions. Experts from in and around the Hepburn Shire also delivered presentations at the Carbon Free Action Workshop in October including:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| • Jo Kaptein | More Australian Solar Homes |
| • Genevieve Barlow & Don Culvenor | Renewable Newstead |
| • Sally van Rooden | Energy Auditor |
| • Mark Barrie | Form Engineers |
| • Andrea Mason | Ballarat Renewable Energy & Zero Emissions |
| • Taryn Lane | Hepburn Wind |

Several local sustainability groups also participated in the sessions including SHARE, Trentham Sustainability Group, Transition Creswick and Clunes Sustainability Group.

WHAT WAS LEARNT?

Hepburn Shire Council had aimed to have clear community projects articulated after these workshops. It became apparent during the sessions however that, while participants expressed a desire for action, their focus was less on implementing specific individual projects than it was on setting a clear vision and structure for the community around renewable energy. This included the development of the necessary networks, partnerships and technical capacity, coupled with exploring viable models for engagement and funding.

It was identified that it will take time to build capacity and develop this framework. Once these are established, the community will be able to develop and realise many of the ideas which were put forward, but were identified as needing further development at the time. The resources required to build this capacity will include a combination of education, proactive engagement and community, industry and Council leadership.

It became evident that there is significant benefit in displaying to community how ideas can be developed to become worthwhile, tangible projects. It is anticipated that the delivery of Council supported programs such as HSBB and Z-NET, together with current and future

Council run projects such as Towards Zero Emissions Community Grants will be instrumental in demonstrating best practice programs to community. These will help to showcase how well structured programs can provide the community with opportunities and benefits at a social, environmental and economic level.

WHAT IS THE PROJECT LEGACY?

The project brought together a broad cross section of the community and helped to re-energise community groups that have been striving for carbon neutrality for some time. It also highlighted that Council is willing to support the community to transition towards carbon neutrality through a well structured Shire-wide roadmap. This willingness is evidenced by ongoing support for community based programs, together with Council's Toward Zero Emission Roadmap which addresses emissions due to its own operations.

The implementation of some form of community committee for the Hepburn Shire is a key project outcome which is envisaged to be the fundamental legacy of this project. This committee will be Council backed and will assist in delivering the desired outcomes as identified by community, industry and Council.

For the duration of the initial Z-NET pilot program and beyond, community and Council in the Hepburn Shire will work to:

- Develop and maintain a reference group with representation from community, industry and Council.
- Document and assess ideas brought forward by community. This may include historical ideas (from before the sessions), ideas presented at the sessions, or new ideas put forward.
- Develop, support and refine a framework for the assessment of potential projects.
- Develop, support and refine a framework to facilitate the implementation of viable projects.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and education between relevant stakeholders within and surrounding the Hepburn Shire, and also within the broader global community.
- Provide a platform for community, industry and Council to communicate and collaborate.
- Support and promote programs which work to advance the overarching goal of net carbon neutrality.

DELWP grant funding	\$10,000
Hepburn Shire Council funding (Cash & In-Kind)	\$2,000
Total budget	\$12,000

Dominic Murphy
Sustainability Officer
Hepburn Shire Council
Ph: 5321 6490 M: 0437 061 349 e: dmurphy@hepburn.vic.gov.au