

THURGOONA

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

Report from the Thurgoona Renewable Energy Forum

Supported by



**Held at 6.30pm on
30 November 2017
at the Thurgoona
Country Club Resort**





Report prepared 6 December 2017

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RAW Energy
 TCAG
 TRY

Renewable Albury Wodonga
 Thurgoona Community Action Group
 Totally Renewable Yackandandah



SUMMARY

In November 2017, over ninety people attended a meeting to hear about opportunities and to explore ways the Thurgoona community might generate its own energy.

Speakers from RAW Energy, Totally Renewable Yackandandah and Mondo Power presented their ideas and experiences to attendees. After a panel session, a number of initiatives were proposed by the crowd for further exploration.

The forum's dominant ideas were: a community retailer, a community solar farm with a large battery, a bulk purchase initiative that includes solar and batteries, a mini grid; and provision of further information and/or education sessions. A bulk purchase initiative that includes solar panels and batteries was the most popular option, followed by a community solar farm.

There were a large number of questions from the audience that couldn't be answered on the night due to time constraints, many of these were about feed-in tariffs and energy suppliers. This supports future information and/or education sessions about energy pricing.

The week following the workshop, an electronic newsletter was sent to attendees. This included a copy of the presentations and a link to the NSW Government Energy Made Easy website.



Mark Judd (Mondo Power), Matt Charles-Jones (TRY), Bobbi McKibbin (RAW Energy), Michelle Wilkinson, Arthur Latta and Katrina Passey

BACKGROUND

The community energy movement is well underway and this forum presented an opportunity for the people of Thurgoona, NSW, to consider if they wanted to be part of it.

The purpose of the forum was to gauge Thurgoona residents' interest in a community renewable energy project. By starting the conversation about a local renewable energy project the TCAG sought to:

- Identify the level of community interest for a local clean energy project
- Identify potential projects to investigate
- Recognise that community engagement is key to a community energy project's success
- Interact with community stakeholders to increase future participation in or support for a future project, and for membership of TCAG and RAW Energy.

Community energy is defined as being any renewable energy project initiated and/or developed by the community to deliver broad benefits to the local community.

A community energy project may also be delivered in partnership with a private developer or independent power producer.¹

Community-owned renewable energy projects create social, political, environmental, economic and technological benefits by:

1. strengthening local economies;
2. building community participation, resilience & empowerment;
3. educating people about renewable energy and involving them in creating a sustainable low carbon future;
4. directly and significantly reducing a community's carbon footprint;
5. developing renewable energy industries, technology, jobs and training.²

1 Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA)
<https://arena.gov.au/about/funding-strategy-investment-plan/community-energy/>

2 Community-owned renewable energy 'A How to Guide', Community Power Agency
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/communities/communityenergyhowtoguide.pdf>

The following examples of how community energy might look were highlighted at the commencement of the forum:

Hepburn Wind is the owner and operator of Australia's first community-owned wind farm, near Daylesford Victoria. The 4.1 MW wind farm hosts two turbines called Gale and Gusto, who produce enough clean energy for over 2,000 homes. Hepburn Wind is a member co-operative of over 2,000 members and is still open for new member shareholders to join the community enterprise. Locals can buy in for a minimum of 100 shares and non-locals can join up with 1,000 shares. www.hepburnwind.com.au

Upper Yarra Community

Enterprise Ltd is planning to develop a mini-hydro scheme in the Yarra Valley town of Warburton. They're hoping to power up to 120 homes using water from a fast-flowing creek as it flows through the local golf course. The scheme will produce year-round power to be fed into the electricity grid. Upper Yarra Community Enterprise Ltd will receive income by selling the power generated. Once the construction and plant costs are paid, profits will be dispersed to the community by supplementing the current Community Bank sponsorship program.

Community Energy 4 Goulburn is a group of residents and businesses who have come together to build a community-funded 1.2-megawatt solar farm, with 4,000 panels and the capacity to power between 350 and 500 houses. Community Energy 4 Goulburn are aiming for the farm to be built and owned by the community, to supply local power - and for profits to stay within the community. www.ce4g.org.au

Solar bulk buy - Darebin Solar Savers

Not everyone can afford to buy solar panels. Darebin Solar Savers in Melbourne was a project that saw the Moreland Energy Foundation put solar on the roofs of 300 pensioners, who used the savings to pay back the cost of the system through their Council rates. The model establishes a structure to better support residents invest in solar PV by engagement through trusted stakeholders and low-interest finance to offset upfront cost. www.energymatters.com.au/renewable-news/em4234/

SolarShare

Not everyone can own a solar system, especially if they don't have a roof to put one on. Canberra-based SolarShare is one of the first companies in Australia looking to change this by introducing a community solar model that allows anyone to share the financial benefits of going solar, even if they rent their home or apartment. 'Go solar' by co-owning a share of a solar farm instead of putting panels on the roof. The electricity that the farm generates is sold to a third party and the profits go back to the member shareholders. www.solarshare.com.au

The forum's speakers were:



BOBBI MCKIBBIN

Director solar integrity and co-founder of RAW Energy

Bobbi invited more people to become involved in community energy because it helps the local community, makes financial sense and protects the environment for generations to come.

RAW Energy is a group of active citizens working to increase the uptake of renewable energy in Albury Wodonga. They believe the community can develop renewable energy projects to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and to provide local economic, social and environmental advantages.

RAW Energy began its journey in 2015 after a meeting in Yackandandah that resulted in the formation of TRY. In late-2015 with the support of Wodonga City Council RAW Energy hosted a local community energy forum.

The RAW Energy vision is: 'Locally generated renewable energy meeting community needs.'

The group's focus is to bring partners together to develop local renewable energy projects.



MATT CHARLES-JONES

**Executive Officer
Totally Renewable Yackandandah**

Yackandandah will soon reach 40% renewable energy and has 14 homes ready to operate as a mini grid, putting them well on the path to 100%.

TRY is an incorporated group formed in early 2014 after a community energy forum organised by Indigo Shire Council. Since then, the group has been run by volunteers with a common vision: to see their town powered by 100% renewable electricity by 2022.

To transition Yackandandah to renewable electricity TRY is working to match energy efficiency upgrades with rooftop solar generation, batteries and smart control systems. Ultimately TRY anticipates hosting interconnected mini-grids within the Yackandandah area and coupling this with larger generation and storage systems, and supported by a Community Energy Retailer.

A mini grid is a system in which a group of households are equipped with individual energy generation in the form of solar panels and battery storage capability. As a mini grid, a group of households can work as a stand-alone energy community.



MARK JUDD

**Manager Energy Solutions
Mondo Power (AusNet Services)**

Mondo Power has helped facilitate the Totally Renewable Yackandandah community energy initiative.

Mark has managed a unique partnership that has not only led the Yackandandah community mini grid project, but also helped AusNet Services create and launch Mondo Power.

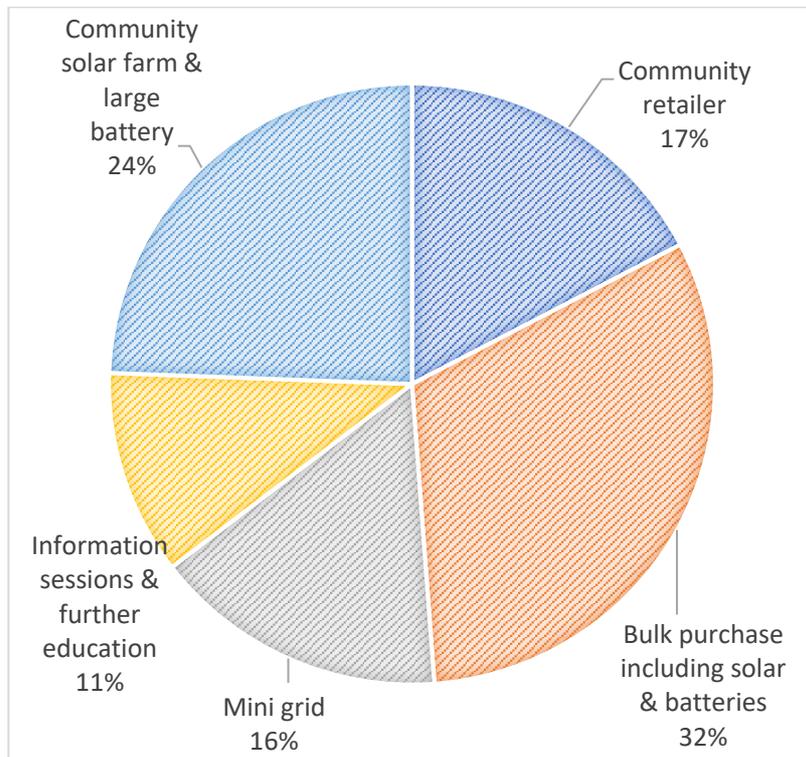
TRY are now embarking on a mini-grid trial with AusNet Services. This is a multi-step process that starts with a house energy assessment and selection of the right solar package for the home owner.

The solar system is equipped with a Mondo Ubi, an advanced smart home energy monitoring and management system that allows connection with the future mini-grid.

FINDINGS

A bulk purchase initiative that includes solar panels and batteries was the most popular option, followed by a community solar farm.

After the speaker presentations, a number of initiatives were proposed by attendees. The dominant ideas were: a community retailer, a community solar farm with a large battery, a bulk purchase initiative that includes solar and batteries, a mini grid; and provision of further information and/or education sessions.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Progress the project ideas

The working group undertake further research on each of the five forum ideas and host a full-day forum with guest speakers related to each project. The forum would explore the suitability of each approach, gather further community support, and promote the formation of a working group to progress initiatives.

2. Develop a network of local community energy champions

Build on the database of Thurgoona forum attendees to develop a base of supporters. These people may ultimately become investors in the final project/s, or may be able to contribute resources or skills to the Thurgoona community energy movement.

3. Further information sharing

The list of questions to the panel along with comments from the evaluation indicate Thurgoona residents' interest in renewable energy opportunities and their desire for further information.

Communications campaign

- a. Regular newsletters that include links to websites and articles, part and/or full-day information forums, or a regular drop-in session at a café, library or Council foyer (perhaps badged as a monthly "RAW Hour").
- b. Thurgoona Community Action Group could establish a Facebook Page, rather than a Group, to share community energy ideas and examples.
- c. Easy access to research related to the local area or plain English summaries of these would be helpful. For example, studies related to the suitability for wind generation and locations for hydro systems.
- d. Case studies exploring community energy could be collated and used to raise awareness and understanding of community energy opportunities.

RAW DATA

Forum participants were invited to contribute to questions and ideas that informed conversations during the evening and provide useful information to guide TCAG, RAW and Albury City Council future activities. The raw data collated is included as:

- Project ideas
- Questions for the panel summary
- Evaluation summary

PROJECT IDEAS

Following the panel discussions forum participants were asked “what interested them most?” and what ideas they would like explored further. This led to identification of four renewable energy projects and the provision of further information and education. For each of these ideas, participants were invited to vote on their preferred option and to record their:

- Hopes - What do you hope this project achieves for your community or business?
- Fears - What concerns do you have about this project?

COMMUNITY RETAILER, 22 votes

Hopes

- Local jobs and funds staying here
- Better feed-in for those who can't negotiate for themselves
- Contribution to community improvements
- Cut out the big business - overseas owners - real competition
- An innovative and inspiring model of community retail governance

Fears

- Could be taken over by a greedy/self-interested person/team
- Time - lack of government commitment
- Time-consuming as it requires monitoring
- Technical difficulty with access - computer, controller, independent meter
- Continuing cost of poles and wires - overhead costs - to deliver power in any system
- Cost to run - how is it kept cheaper?
- Poor governance

COMMUNITY SOLAR FARM AND LARGE BATTERY, 31 votes

Hopes

- Opportunity to invest for private profit and profit share for community needs
- Support energy bills for people such as pensioners and renters
- Cheaper electricity
- Becomes a reality, provides power efficiently, cleanly
- Hope for massive solar uptake, bring in storage when technology is more long term or consider partnering with pumped hydro
- Councils and business as shareholders

Fears

- Will the amount of power usage be dictated / per house hold
- That renters and low-income earners will be left holding the cost of the whole grid
- Ability to expand with demand
- How can the networks cover their costs if only supplying 10% of the power
- Big business tries to stop it, or takes it over e.g. Electric cars 1980's
- Bureaucracy
- Land availability - how much? TAFE, CSU, Defence department - candidates?

- Who owns the land it is built on? Do they get paid annually?
- Lack of institutional support to make it happen
- Must consider life of batteries?

BULK PURCHASE INCLUDING SOLAR AND BATTERIES, 40 votes

Hopes

- Encourage greater uptake
- Affordable for all
- Able to use more of your own power both during day and night
- Can other Albury communities be involved?

Fears

- Need financing support for the less well-off
- When do I get my money back if I go ahead and purchase solar panels, time frame etc.?
- Good quality only - no “deals” to shift sub-standard stock
- What happens when batteries reach end-of-life? Massive waste/recycling?
- Over sell

MINI GRID, 20 votes

Hopes

- Easy way to be less dependent on current retailers
- More sustainable and independent from overall grid

Fears

- Equity
- Can people jump in/out over time?
- Only people that live in Thurgoona would benefit

PROVISION OF FURTHER INFORMATION AND/OR EDUCATION SESSIONS, 14 votes

Hopes

- Everyone to be involved
- Money saved does go back into the community
- Maybe with enough participants, there is a chance to influence landlords, lobby government to meet carbon targets, e.g. we all must have a water tank now with a new build. Why not a minimum 1 kilowatt solar system and purchase part of a large system?
- More buy-in from the community equals a better chance of success
- Any initiatives have broad community support/inclusion - “something for everyone”
- A greater sense of community
- Maybe blend the “more info” with bulk buy info sessions?

Fears

- Split community = stalemate
- Need a clear plan of how benefits can be used
- Risk of being seen as politically influenced
- Some segments of the community feel excluded; are not engaged/supportive
- Worry that even with safeguards, those with the least capacity will end up paying the most for energy.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

Forum participants were asked to submit written questions for the panel. A small number of questions were responded to during the Forum. The following represents all questions asked.

A total of 25 people submitted questions. In no particular order, the questions are:

1. I have solar panels. I am happy to buy battery. I am happy to purchase shares in a renewable electricity retailer / company. Tell me how and what I can do to do this to support the local Thurgoona community.
2. How many local retailers are there, who are they?
3. Who maintains equipment for mini grids?
4. How does anyone help RAW in support roles?
5. I have an existing solar system on my home working - what is the benefit to me of a new solar or renewable energy project when I have one?
6. Is the project going to try and include the rental properties in Thurgoona? Benefits and options for renters? If so, what would be the timing and is it going to be possible to engage with investment property owners that don't live locally?
7. Mini grid - how many households are necessary to make it viable?
8. Who gets the Government Renewable Energy Certificates?
9. Can you talk to developers to add solar as part of house and land packages - esp since Thurgoona is a major growth area. A Canberra suburb / developer has done this recently. Rather than a free shed or landscaping.
10. All of the discussion seems to be about solar. What about using methane - land - fill - gas? That is a viable - especially in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, a little in Brisbane, the generator in Albury seems to have fizzled.
11. Be our own retailer. Co-Op?
12. Efficiency of batteries storage. What are the relative efficiencies of e.g. Home battery / storage vs battery farm e.g. at community scale or bigger?
13. Home battery. Is it a given that home battery will be essential? Or is it feasible / imaginable that large scale, off site batteries will be the norm in future?
14. The mini grid. Does it have its own storage, or is excess electricity going directly to the main grid? PS. I think having the main grid available is extremely beneficial, as an existing network for managing new ways of supplying electricity.
15. How can we realistically reduce our energy bill?
16. Need to get federal / state polices to understand the results of their decisions! How? To change?
17. How can we get panels at a cheaper cost?
18. What is the cost of putting solar on a house?
19. How long until you would see power benefits from solar?
20. What is the cost of a 30-megawatt solar farm?
21. Which of the two ideas is more beneficial (home solar vs solar farm)?

22. If we still need the national grid for the last 10% of our power where will the money come from to maintain this grid?
23. Is the ultimate long-term aim for energy community to be 100% self-sufficient?
24. How important is orientation of roof for solar panels?
25. How much land would a solar farm take?
26. What about new designs for solar panels e.g. Paint on roofs
27. Are we ... to be totally independent?
28. How long does a solar panel last before replacement (told 20 - 40 years)?
29. How does the shared battery work within a group system?
30. Again, how long do batteries last?
31. With rental properties or pensioners - can they buy into this community electricity?
32. How much land and how much money is needed for a 30-megawatt solar farm?
33. What is happening with small scale off river pumped hydro? Yackandandah is surrounded by hills of suitable height for efficient pumped hydro. Or are batteries on this scale simply better and cheaper?
34. Any comments on the Sonnen battery proposal for shared power? (now operating)
35. Compatibility of existing systems with batteries? Will the controllers talk to each other?
36. Community retailing - what prevents a more profit based company taking it over and ripping people off (again)?
37. Trading power - do you see power hedger in the future? Block chain already in WA.
38. Where do energy retailers invest their profits? If I feed energy back into the grid where there is a substantial profit made by the retailer. I feel people should know how this is used e.g. back into renewable or coal in Australia or OS.
39. Currently having 2kw system whilst using appliances with the sun shining can you control your usage from going over what your panels are producing at the time? E.g. Your kettle could cut out if there is not enough immediate solar roof top power available.
40. What is the lifespan of this system?
41. What about maintenance?
42. How dependent are each house holder on others maintaining their panels?
43. The population of Thurgoona is 10,000. Is 100% renewable achievable? The population is said to be 50,000 in 50 years.
44. Current solar panels are about 20% efficient, but where is research in improving the output efficiency?
45. What about water heating by solar energy?
46. Solar efficiency in Thurgoona in winter vs summer - can you quantify?
47. How would you finance a solar farm in Thurgoona?

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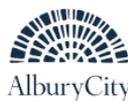
COMMUNITY RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUM

This forum is an opportunity for Thurgoona residents and businesses to come together to discuss renewable energy and imagine how local energy generation might look in the future. Community-owned renewables are a fantastic opportunity for all of us to participate in developing clean energy. How our community switches on renewables is up to us.

Hear from **Totally Renewable Yackandandah**,
Renewable Albury Wodonga Energy and **Mondo Power**.

6PM FOR A 6.30PM START
ON THURSDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2017
AT THURGOONA COUNTRY CLUB RESORT,
1 EVESHAM PLACE, THURGOONA.

RSVP by calling 0434 967 897
online at OurThurgoona.eventbrite.com.au
or by emailing OurThurgoona@gmail.com



Our event sponsor

EVENT AGENDA

Over ninety people attended the forum held on Thursday, 30 November 2017.

 	
RUNNING SHEET	
Time	Activity
6pm	Arrive and check in
6.30pm	Welcome Cr David Thurley
6.35pm	Thanks for coming Why we are here Thanks to Albury Council and RAW Arthur Latta
6.40pm	Agenda Slideshow – examples of community energy projects Introduction to guest speakers Sue & Tammy
6.50pm	Guest speaker An overview of RAW, what is happening, what is planned Bobbi McKibbin
7.00pm	Guest speaker Totally Renewable Yackandandah - the community's experience Matt Charles-Jones
7.10pm	Guest speaker Mondo Services – working with community Mark Judd
7.20pm	Questions for the panel (Michelle, Katrina, Sue & Tammy to theme and prep questions for the panel) Sue & Tammy
7.30pm	Take a break
7.40pm	Panel discussion Bobbi, Matt and Mark
8.10pm	What interests you? Your project ideas Vote on priorities Sue & Tammy
	Workshop evaluation Sue & Tammy
8.25pm	Whats next <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email with links and project ideas TCAG report on workshop Connect with TCAG and RAW Sue & Tammy Arthur
8.30pm	Close

30/11/17


 Albury City
 Our event sponsor

EVALUATION SUMMARY

Forum participants were asked to answer set questions using a Likert scale, indicate their response to the amount of time allocated to the workshop and provide open responses to three questions. A total of 34 evaluation forms were returned with responses collated and included below.

The forum content was of interest to me

	1	2	3	4	5
	Very poor			Very good	
Responses			2	11	21

*The forum content is relevant and applicable to my household/
work/community group*

	1	2	3	4	5
	Very poor			Very good	
Responses	1	3	3	11	16

I felt encouraged to participate during the forum

	1	2	3	4	5
	Very poor			Very good	
Responses			4	13	15

The time allocated to the workshop was

	About right	Too long	Too short
Responses	26	2	1

How would you rate your knowledge of community energy before this workshop?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Very little knowledge					Well informed				
Responses	2	6	8	7	2	3	3	1	2	

Now that you've attended this workshop, how interested are you in community energy now?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	→									
Responses					1	3	7	5	8	10

RESPONSES TO THE OPEN QUESTIONS

What aspect/s of the workshop was of most interest to you?

1. Community ownership
 2. Community aspect of working together (co-op)
 3. Bulk purchase
 4. Mini grid aspects
 5. How it could benefit the community further and renters etc.
 6. The concept of a solar farm and battery with the works (mini grid and retailer) for Thurgoona
 7. Local community is the beneficiary
 8. Ideas of bulk purchase (battery) and community retailer / mini grid
 9. Time to recover costs
 10. Knowledge of the panel speakers
 11. Building solar farm
 12. Different energy ideas
 13. Cost for families to buy into different options
 14. The possibility of a community energy group to help improve our % of renewable energy
 15. The flexibility of the group in their thinking and inclusion of people
 16. Batteries
 17. The degree of community interest in developing renewable energy for Thurgoona
 18. Mini grid
 19. Community battery
 20. Community solar farm
 21. Use of solar... locally / Yack
 22. Bulk buy purchase and solar farm
 23. Solar bulk purchase, community power supplier, solar farm, mini grid
 24. Most of it
 25. Mini grid
 26. Key speakers with vision and experience
 27. Community grid/power with battery
 28. Establishment of local energy retailer
 29. Community mini grid
 30. Community energy retail
 31. Battery storage at home
 32. Three speakers - current initiatives
 33. Range of opportunities
 34. Age spectrum of audience (lot of grey hair - me included!)
 35. Discussion of progress of other groups
 36. I want to do something with renewable energy - I want guidance
 37. Social aspects - not leaving people behind
 38. Tech issues - I already have a system with battery
 39. The existing groups
- Are there any further comments you'd like to make?***
40. Who is likely to get project becoming viable?
 41. Does the energy company become involved early on?
 42. Thanks for putting this on
 43. I think land values for a solar farm in Thurgoona would be expensive
 44. Would like to see further regular forums to maintain the momentum
 45. To get work on a local project do you need a qualification in solar installation - could there be a project specific training course locally?

46. Very interesting and informative, thank you!!
47. Land developers to be more involved
48. No thank you
49. Hot water from urn was not hot
50. Busy time of the year, maybe need another event to get more people here
51. Maybe more advertising
52. I'd love to be involved in a community energy group or a mini grid
53. Bulk purchase of batteries would be great (I already have panels)
54. Where as a community do we go from here?
55. Would love to see questions answered via email out
56. Batteries - bulk buy?
57. Very informative
58. An integrated plan to include all of the above (Solar bulk purchase, community power supplier, solar farm, mini grid)
59. Very interesting to see where it goes
60. Great work!
61. Like to question and feedback sessions - allowed people's input
62. Cost for me a bit prohibitive
63. Need more affordable solar batteries - may be bulk purchase for Thurgoona?
64. Good speakers
65. Very informative and open
66. I already have the panels and money to invest ... what now!
67. So exciting, I just want it all underway already
68. Explore bulk purchase of batteries for storage
69. It is going to take a lot of time, energy and work by individuals driving this. How can they be supported, paid for effort?
70. Bit long
71. Main interest - energy storage, supply to individual dwellings

All people who requested inclusion on the mailing list have had their details added to the Mail Chimp database.

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

View this email in your browser Forward to a friend

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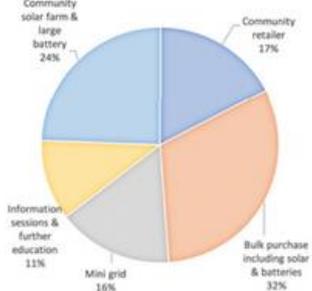
Community Renewable Energy Forum

Hi <<First Name>>,

Thank you for attending last Thursday's renewable energy forum in Thurgoona. It was a timely conversation and a good lead into the discussions in Yackandandah the next day about developments and opportunities for community renewable energy.

The ideas you provided to us were:

- Community energy retailer, 22 votes
- Community solar farm and large battery, 31 votes
- Bulk purchase, including solar and batteries, 40 votes
- Mini-grid, 20 votes
- Energy information sessions, 14 votes



Idea	Percentage
Bulk purchase including solar & batteries	32%
Community solar farm & large battery	24%
Mini grid	16%
Information sessions & further education	13%
Community retailer	17%

Next steps? We're buoyed by the interest in community-owned clean energy projects and we'll now report back to the event's sponsor, Albury City Council. There is a need for further information - your questions and feedback from the forum have shown that we have a lot to do!

We'll also continue to be part of the conversation about a cross-border energy project that the Renewable Albury Wodonga (RAW) team is spearheading.

Below, you'll find links to the forum's presentations, further information and details for the Thurgoona Community Action Group and RAW. We hope those of you who live in Thurgoona will consider joining our [Facebook group](#).

Thanks again,

Arthur Latta and Bridget O'Connor
Co-chairs, Thurgoona Community Action Group
thurgoonacag@gmail.com

Further information

Download the Forum presentations

Energy advice - understand offers + bills, solve problems



Clean Energy Council: Free guides for households & businesses



Ag Innovators

Find out about energy efficiency, solar pumping & renewables for your farm



Join us

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COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

Learn more about Thurgoona Community Action Group



Learn more about Renewable Albury Wodonga



Happenings in this space

The Border Mail

Community energy retailer the next step for Yackandandah



Learn more about community energy



We'd like to again thank our sponsor, [Albury City Council](#), and our Forum speakers: Bobbi McKinnin from [Renewable Albury Wodonga](#), Matt Charles-Jones from [Totally Renewable Yackandandah](#) and Mark Judd from [Mondo](#).

We'll be working with [Renewable Albury Wodonga \(RAW Energy\)](#) to progress the ideas raised at the 31 November 2017 forum - to keep you in the loop we may pass your email address on to them. If you do not want this to happen please [unsubscribe](#).

[unsubscribe from this list.](#)

