

## ■ Hepburn community windfarm

# Sod turned in national first

By MEG RAYNER

WIND whipped around politicians and members of Hepburn Wind as the first sod was turned at the Hepburn Community Wind Park yesterday.

The weather was fitting for the occasion, which saw Australia's first community-owned wind farm become a reality after five years of planning.

More than 250 supporters, including state Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings, Member for Ballarat East Geoff Howard, and Member for Ballarat Catherine King, were at the Leonards Hill ceremony, located 10 kilometres south of Daylesford.

The \$12.9 million project received \$8.4 million of funding from local residents buying shares in the wind park. A portion of the income made from selling the green energy will go into a community fund.

Protesters were also on site to voice their concerns about

the health issues associated with wind farms and the proximity of the turbines to homes.

Mr Jennings said he was excited to be a part of what is a landmark project in the state.

"The Hepburn Community Wind Park will generate enough renewable energy to power the majority of houses in the Daylesford-Hepburn area — that's saving 12,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas annually, or 244 million black balloons," he said.

"It's great the community has come together to support one another to do good things for the environment.

"We think it will show great leadership across Victoria."

Hepburn Wind chairman Simon Holmes a Court said 1340 community members had bought shares in the project.

He hopes to encourage other communities to develop similar co-operative projects through their newly launched Embark organisation.

"This will give other

communities the information they need to adapt and adopt this model to their own situation," he said.

Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions is also supporting the project.

"Hepburn Wind are inspirational in their leadership of community-owned renewable energy and we enjoyed the celebration of yesterday's ground breaking event," Melanie Wollcock said. "Embark will inspire and empower communities across Australia in transitioning away from their dependence on polluting coal-fired power stations and embracing renewable energy."

In three weeks time construction of roads and infrastructure will begin, with the turbines expected to be erected next Easter. Organisers believe clean energy will start flowing into the local energy grid by mid 2011.

"I think this is great because we see the community coming together to say we want to take action in regard to climate change," Geoff Howard said.



**IN A SPIN:** Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings at the site of Australia's first community-owned windfarm, the Hepburn Community Wind Park.





**VOICE:** Protester Tony Russell greets windfarm supporters as official work began at the Hepburn Community Wind Park yesterday. Pictures: **Adam Trafford**



**IN A SPIN:** Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings at the site of Australia's first community-owned windfarm, the Hepburn Community Wind Park.

## Protesters drum home their view

FOR Leonard's Hill resident Myrna Frost, the thought of a windfarm in her backyard makes her furious.

Construction on the Hepburn Community Wind Park will begin in just weeks, 470 metres from her home.

She joined about 50 protesters at the turning of the first sod, armed with placards, drums and a strong message.

"I am absolutely disgusted to think that the state government has let this go ahead," she said.

Her main concerns are based on residents' health reasons, the impact on bird

life and interference with underground streams.

Daylesford and District Landscape Guardians president Jan Perry said the main motivation behind the windfarm was profit, not the environment.

"The government wants to subsidise \$2 million of our taxpayers' money for just two turbines that will produce absolutely nothing, I'm upset about that," she said.

"But the distance is a real concern. We want the wind industry regulated and we need setbacks from houses; 500 metres from homes is ridiculous because it affects

our wellbeing and our health."

Protesters represented a good cross-section of the community, with young and old, rich and poor represented.

Stockyard Hill resident Megan Read said she was opposed to windfarms in inappropriate places, without proper community consultation.

"The community needs to be consulted as a whole, not just participating land holders," she said. "Also, (we want) all the effects on health and noise to be properly researched, independently."