



The Moorabool News

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Tuesday 12 October, 2010

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Another first

By Kate Taylor

Construction of Australia's first community owned wind farm at Leonards Hill in Moorabool Shire has begun with the turning of the first sod on the site.

State Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings attended the official ground breaking ceremony for the Hepburn Wind Park last week with construction expected to be completed next year.

Two 2.05 MW wind turbines will be built at the site and Hepburn Wind says expert analysis predicts the wind farm will generate more power than is used in Daylesford homes annually.

Mr. Jennings said the \$13 million project had been backed by \$1.7 million from State Government.

"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.

"I would like to congratulate Hepburn Wind for their vision and commitment in pulling together the community, raising funds and bringing the project to the point where it is about to become a reality," he said.

Hepburn Wind chairman Simon Holmes á Court said he expects the wind turbines would be fully operational in the first half of 2011.

"We are very proud to be the first community in Australia to take shared ownership of our own wind farm. The project has taken five years to get to this point and the support of many volunteers and of the Victorian Government, in particular Sustainability Victoria, has been extremely important," he said.

The Hepburn Wind Co-operative is made up of over 1350 members including local families and philanthropic organisations.

Since launching in 2008, Hepburn Wind members have invested more than \$8.3 million in the community owned project.

Members will share in the proceeds of the sale of electricity and profits are returned via a community sustainability fund. Over the next 25 years, Hepburn Wind plans to contribute more than \$1 million to sustainability initiatives in the local community.

Approximately 50 protesters were at the event, abusing and thrusting placards toward people attending the ceremony.

The Australian Environment Foundation issued a media release last week claiming it would join with local residents and landscape guardian groups to protest to the Minister against the construction of wind farms in Victoria.



State Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings (centre) dug the first sod atop Leonards Hill supported by Hepburn Wind chairman Simon Holmes á Court (right) and Ballarat East MP Geoff Howard. Photo Helen Tatchell