

Wind park launched

“
Our project is not just about building two wind turbines, it is about empowering local people
”

By Rachel Afflick

MORE than 200 wind power supporters gathered at the Hepburn Community Wind Park site at Leonards Hill last Friday to celebrate the breaking of ground on Australia's first community-owned wind farm.

Hepburn Wind chairman Simon Holmes a Court said the project was about more than building two wind turbines — it was a demonstration of how communities were taking the lead on climate change.

“Our project is not just about building two wind turbines, it is about empowering local people to become engaged and active participants in responding to the challenge of climate change,” he said.

Cheers and applause rang out when Environment Minister Gavin Jennings turned the first sod at the site, marking the beginning of a construction process that will see two REpower 2.05mW wind turbines built that will annually generate more power than is used by the all the houses in Daylesford.

Mr Jennings said it was a story about power in a broader concept, in demonstrating what could be collectively achieved.

“We should be enlivened and enthused by the experience seen here,” Mr Jennings said.

“I am delighted to be celebrating this milestone with Hepburn Wind co-operative members and the wider



LAUNCH: Chairman of Hepburn Wind, Simon Holmes a Court, addresses the crowd at the ground-breaking ceremony last Friday.

Hepburn Shire community for what is a landmark project in this state.”

Mr Jennings said the \$13 million project had been backed by \$1.7 million from the state government and was a great example of government-community partnership.

Those attending the ceremony heard how Hepburn Wind started out as an idea led by a group of Daylesford residents who were keen to reduce pollution and inspire their community to be part of the solution to climate change.

Their idea snowballed into the creation of the Hepburn

Wind co-operative, that now has more than 1350 members who have collectively invested more than \$8.3 million to make the first-ever Australian community-owned wind farm a reality.

Members are to share in the proceeds of the sale of electricity and profits will be returned via a community sustainability fund.

Hepburn Shire deputy mayor Rod May said what started as an idea from the local community had grown to become a shining example of what communities could do everywhere to become sustainable.

But not everyone shared these sentiments.

A vocal group of about 50 protestors who gathered at the entrance of the site said health, noise and environmental factors among the reasons why the Brumby government should immediately review its wind farms policy.

The Hepburn Wind announcement coincided with the launch of Embark, an independent, non-profit organisation, dedicated to accelerating the uptake of community renewable energy projects.

Embark says it will assist other communities to learn from the Hepburn Wind model and build similar projects.

Hepburn Wind expects the wind farm to be fully operation in the first half of 2011.

Frustration spills over as wind farm protestors voice their opposition

By Rachel Afflick

FOR Leonards Hill resident Jan Perry, six years of frustration spilled out during last Friday's protest at Hepburn Wind's ground-breaking ceremony.

Ms Perry, who is president of Daylesford and District Landscape Guardians, joined about 50 other wind farm opponents in a very vocal protest at the site.

She said one of the turbines was going up just 700 metres from her home and some homes would have just a 500 metre buffer.

"The turbines are certainly not community-owned," she said.

"They're 500 metres from our homes, which is the closest in Victoria.

"I've been fighting this fight

for six years because it's so unjust."

Another resident, Maree Frost, said one of the turbines would be just 500 metres from her home of 30 years.

"The fact is we will have to put up with the low level hum noise," she said

"I don't want to move out of my house."

Executive director of the Australian Environment Foundation Max Rheese said the aim of the protest was "to make people aware the populous narrative that is put out about wind power is not shared by everybody".

"The fact is that wind farm is being subsidised by with \$1.7 million by Australian tax payers to produce the most expensive energy that will be produced in Victoria," he said

"We're calling for the government to review their wind farm policy because as far as we're concerned it's based on a fake premise: that it's cheap, safe and good for the environment."

But Korweinguboorra resident Matt Childs said he lived less than a kilometre from the site and supported the wind farm.

He decided to purchase shares in Hepburn Wind after researching the issue.

"When it was proposed I thought I would go to an existing wind farm and get all the facts," he said.

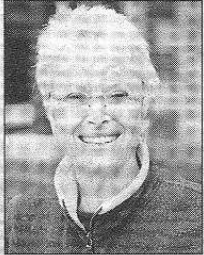
"I've come to the conclusion that it's a good thing. It's the community taking responsibility for its power needs."



WIND PROTEST: Protestor Maree Frost greets the windfarm supporters at last Friday's protest at Hepburn Wind's ground-breaking ceremony.

Vox Pop

Do you support wind farms?



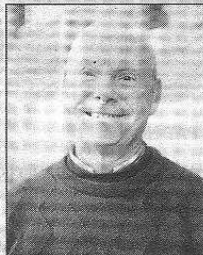
CAROLINE BELLAIRE,
Glenlyon: Yes, I do.
We've got to get our energy somewhere. It's much better than building coal-fired power stations.



DAVID GRIGG,
Yandoit: Yes.
Renewable energy is good for the country. I think it's a great local initiative.



MARY LILAND,
Daylesford: My first reaction is that wind farms are good. I have sympathy for the people who live nearby but, if you look at it in terms of energy, I think it's a good thing.



ROBERT HAMMOND,
Bullarook: Yes, I do.
It's going to hopefully reduce the carbon footprint. That's hopefully — we don't know how much wind farm technology is going to cost in carbon to make.

Wind farm shows the way

I WAS so proud to be part of a community that is leading the way in community-owned green power.

The turning of the first sod of the Hepburn Wind farm happened on Friday.

Hepburn is providing a shining example of how we can act together and not wait for governments to make their ponderous way towards a clean, pollution-free world.

There were three or four locals protesting and making false claims about the turbines.

They were concerned about the possible adverse health effects on their kids and, oddly, proposed nuclear power as a better alternative.

If there was a choice of my grandkids playing near an elegant wind turbine or fossicking in a nuclear waste dump, I know what I would prefer.

There is no solid science that supports their claims, but I do wonder who backed this protesting group and funded their professionally-made signs.

It was disturbing to see approximately 12 to 15 protestors who were not locals, aggressively intimidate women and children who were peacefully attending the celebration of this milestone in the history of Hepburn Wind.

I support their right to protest, but not the malevolent manner in which they did it.

ANNEKE DEUTSH
Elevated Plains