

Community raises wind turbine – Wind turbine raises community.

Monday 21 March – Daylesford

Hepburn Wind has fulfilled its promise of building Australia's first community owned renewable energy project, after a weekend of community celebration and turbine construction at Leonards Hill, 10 km south of Daylesford.

Saturday's brilliant weather and a rare, still afternoon at Victoria's ninth and newest wind farm was picture perfect and luckily construction perfect. In an unprecedented event, around 300 of the 1,600 proud owners of the wind farm gathered at short notice for a picnic to watch and celebrate as the tower sections were lifted into place. Entertained by local musicians in beautiful surrounds, many stayed all the way through to watch the spectacular moonrise, congratulating each other as they watched in awe.

The most dedicated returned on Sunday morning hoping to watch the rotor lifted into position, however consistent high winds over the site postponed the lifting until calmer weather returns.

The second turbine will be raised in the coming days and both will be visible from key vantage points around the shire with a total height of just under 110 metres.

This event marks the most spectacular phase of construction for the co-operatively owned wind farm. It's a monumental achievement for a community that has held a vision to build a wind farm for the benefit of the local area. To build the \$13m project, the wind farm co-operative's members have collectively invested more than \$8.7m, a clear indication of enormous local support for renewable energy.

The project was born out of frustration with the pace of action on climate change – the community's project is expected to generate more energy than is used by Daylesford in an average year, and will displace an estimated 12,200 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

Hepburn Wind was conceived in 2005 and launched its membership and share offer in July 2008. Members will share in the proceeds of the sale of electricity and a portion of profits will be returned via a community sustainability fund. Through the fund, Hepburn Wind plans to fund more than \$1m of sustainability initiatives in the local community over the next 25 years.

Built from the start with the community in mind, the locally controlled wind farm is the first in the country to allocate more to the community than to the landowner of the wind farm.

Hepburn wind has inspired more than 40 communities around Australia to begin development of their own solar, wind and mini-hydro initiatives. Community owned projects will play a vital role in driving the inevitable move to a low-carbon economy.