

Leonards Hill welcomes a 'Gale' with 'Gusto'

By Tom Kingston

Jenny and I went to the launch of the Hepburn Community Wind Farm at Leonards Hill last Saturday, November 5. For those of you who aren't aware of Hepburn Wind it started a few years back when a couple of Daylesford locals got together. One of the locals had seen places in Denmark where local towns supply their own electricity in a clean way by using wind generators. So the project began and was officially launched on Saturday. The two turbines are projected to produce more energy than the houses in Daylesford use each year. As Simon Holmes à Court, Chairman of Hepburn Wind said at the launch, 'Australians love renewable energy. With the passage of the carbon legislation this week, many other regional communities will benefit from the transformation of our energy sector.' The Hepburn Community Wind Farm was declared officially open when a 10 year old student from a school in Creswick cut a massive ribbon wrapping the girth of one of the wind towers in front of about 800 people. The student beat a pretty big field of other school children in the region, in a competition to name the 2 REpower wind turbines. Her winning names are 'Gale' and 'Gusto'.

If you drive from Ballan to Daylesford, as you near Leonard's Hill you will see 'Gale' and 'Gusto'. Local people dreamed a dream and saw it through to completion. As the Prime Minister wrote in her congratu-

latory note for the event, "This is how so much of our energy is going to be generated in the future – not in far off power stations but in local communities, capturing the power nature gives us through the wind and the sun." I personally know that at a time when all the talk of climate change can get me down here is something to lift my spirits. The tragedy of the current state government's ruling about wind turbines is that the people of Woodend and Castlemaine who were present at the launch, and who were about to start their own turbines, are not allowed under this state government's new rulings. Remembering that the state government heavily subsidises the coal industry this act to stop locals from providing their own power seems to indicate to me at least the power of the coal lobby and associated businesses in Victoria. That a property owner can't stop a heavily polluting coal mine and generating plant if it's close by her home yet can stop a wind turbine if it's up to 2 kms away, says it all.

What was a very pleasant surprise to me on Saturday was the number who attended the launch of Hepburn Wind. I must say that from the letters to the editors in the local papers I had come to the conclusion that most locals were against wind farms. I found to my delight that this just isn't the case. I spoke to a man with a young family who lives in Waubra and he sees wind turbines from both his front and back doors and has had no problems with these turbines. He also

said that while there was some opposition to the wind farm in the community this was limited to a vocal few. (A group calling itself 'The Waubra Foundation' often has press releases against wind farms. For a quick look at the businesses behind this 'Foundation' which incidentally has no Waubra members, Google 'Who is the Waubra Foundation Really?')

I had also been on a tour to the Ararat wind farm a few years back and hadn't noticed much noise. Again after reading the letters to the editors and the articles on the noise etc I had come to the belief that maybe I was mistaken. Again I found no problem standing under these giants on Saturday. As the Prime Minister said in her congratulatory note on the launch, "I know these decisions aren't always easy for regional communities because people want to protect the amenity that makes their region so attractive in the first place." I also know that some people are genuinely worried about these wind farms and it seems that worry will remain for some. However, the 800 locals, including hundreds of children saw nothing to worry about and indeed felt good and positive as they celebrated the launch of a community owned electricity project under 'Gale' and 'Gusto'.

What is your opinion?

Next MEG meeting: Tuesday November 29 at 131 Halletts Way, Darley at 7.30pm for Christmas gathering. All Welcome.