

RP3023

COMMUNITY-OWNED RENEWABLE ENERGY: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR REGIONAL COMMUNITIES?

Community-owned renewable energy (CORE) is a form of development in which communities (of location and interest) are integrally involved in the initiation, development, decision making, management and benefit of the facility.

Problems

CORE projects take many forms, from 50kW through to 20MW, across the spectrum of renewable energy technologies and using many different organisational forms - from cooperatives, to trusts, to companies.

Two key characteristics distinguish these projects from other forms of development:

Processes - on-going opportunities for community to participate in decisions & to shape the project to local needs and values.

Outcomes - economic and social benefits are shared with local shareholders and the broader community. (Walker & Devine-Wright 2008)

Solution

This research seeks to understand the social and economic impacts of community-owned renewable energy initiatives in small, regional communities.

In a context of increasing urban migration and drought, finding new sources of income for small regional communities in ways that are also environmentally responsible is crucially important. CORE offers opportunities to contribute to regional vitality and resilience by capitalising on the under-utilised, but vast capacity for renewable energy generation in regional areas. For off-grid and edge-of-grid communities, these projects can also offer increased energy security.

Many benefits are attributed to CORE within popular and academic writing. Less clear are the conditions under which CORE projects create positive effects in communities. It is this gap that this research seeks to address. In particular, this research looks into the influence of legal structures, economic arrangements and community engagement practices on project outputs & outcomes in communities.

Using mainly qualitative techniques, this research will draw on two case studies from Australia and two from Scotland.

Benefits

Figure 1: Hepburn Wind, a 4.1MW wind farm in Victoria cooperatively owned by 2,000 mostly local people.



A community approach allows everyday people to participate in, benefit from and advocate for renewable energy in Australia.

Research outcomes will be of use to community groups and industry who seek to develop community oriented renewable energy initiatives, both in Australia and overseas. It will also be of use in policy development in areas of regional development and renewable energy, as well as for organisations seeking to enhance positive engagement of communities in transitions to renewable energy.

Contacts

Jarra Hicks, Phd Candidate (UNSW)

Supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Susan Thompson (UNSW) & Prof. Bronwen Morgan (UNSW)

NSW Office of Environment & Heritage,
Regional Clean Energy Program

Suntech

Jarra.Hicks@student.unsw.edu.au