

Community Energy and Benefits Programs

COUNCIL NAME

Murray River Council

WEB ADDRESS

<https://www.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au/Home>

SIZE

11,865 square kilometres

POPULATION

12,000

Overview of the project

This Case study is a summary of a Community Energy Scoping Document funded by Murray River Council's (MRC) [Building Our Communities in Advance](#) project via funding from Local Government NSW. This project builds upon the purpose and vision of MRC's [Adverse Event Plan](#) resilience principles of community capacity building.

Western Murray Land Improvement Group (WMLIG) originally planned to investigate the development of a Community Energy Retail Hub as a social enterprise proposal to create local jobs, incentivise the uptake of renewable energy for a fair price and provide an income stream back to a [Community Foundation](#). This proposal would ultimately reduce economic leakage from the region and enable funds to hit the ground in an expedient manner to support self-reliance and recovery from the impact of an adverse event, such as drought, fire, or flood, and as such aligns to MRC's Adverse Event Plan (AEP) developed in 2020 via input from the local community.

The [Community Energy Scoping Document](#) provides a snapshot of Federal and State energy policies as well as case studies of various community energy schemes covering social enterprise energy retailers (e.g. Energy Locals and Enova Community Energy), and community energy investment projects that have been taken to market, such as ClearSky Solar, community-Local Government options such as Farming the Sun Lismore Community Solar, options for micro-grids, biomass energy, and larger majority community-owned schemes.

The project aligns with the NSW DPIE report [Western Enabling Regional Adaptation](#), regarding a change model for energy in the Riverina Murray region; *Futurecast; re 'resilient and diversified energy systems that include renewable generation and balanced supply from micro and national energy grids. The region is energy self-sufficient through the integration of reliable, high capacity storage, and a net energy exporter.'*



How the project was carried out

A Community Energy Scoping Document was completed that provides an overview of Federal and State government policies, and community energy scheme models. In addition, WMLIG contacted a community energy retail provider, Energy Locals, to understand the pro's and con's of households and businesses to join up for community good outcomes.

REFERENCES

Refer to WMLIG
Community Energy
Scoping Document

NSW DPIE Report,
Western Enabling
Regional Adaptation

Outcomes now and in the future

Current opportunity:

WMLIG has signed up to EnergyLocals as part of its due diligence to ensure that there are no unreasonable risks associated with entering into an agreement. If successful, WMLIG will promote EnergyLocals to members and the broader community. Sign-ups will provide an income stream to our group to conduct community capacity activities, such as field days and workshops in the future, which in turn support our members.

Opportunities moving forward:

The NSW Government is actively supporting Community Operated Renewable Energy (CORE) projects through the Regional Clean Energy Program (RCEP), which employs six Regional Clean Energy Coordinators. These Coordinators are supporting communities in their engagement in large and small-scale projects across a variety of renewable technologies. The Environment Department's Clean Energy Knowledge Sharing Initiative is supporting 10 projects and feasibility studies across the state. These programs could be an option for the community to pursue in the future.

The value of a CORE Hub for this community appears worthwhile to pursue, as such WMLIG would welcome the opportunity to partner with MRC to secure resources resources that would further scope community support and create a community vision to help make a Community Energy Project a success. A CORE resource would:

- perform pre-feasibility studies to scope what is feasible, viable and desirable
- define project technology, scale and site; and develop an initial business case
- create an engagement strategy and associated tools, engage with the community and build support

Getting people on board with the project vision will build the base of champions in the community and, ultimately, these people will become the investor base. Form a community working group from an existing, well-established organisation in the community.

WMLIG has included options for a community energy hub and bioenergy project in the 10 year MRC Community Strategic Plan and has embarked on an organic waste to energy and bio-fertiliser project with the One Basin Cooperative Research Centre in partnership with Murray River Council (see [Agri-innovation precinct proposal](#)).

Several large renewable energy projects are proposed within the Murray River Council area. Community groups have the opportunity to tap into community benefits programs associated with these projects in the future which will provide financial grants to support community events, projects and activities. A Scholarship Program is also proposed to support local students to further education at University or TAFE.

Benefits and lessons learned

Becoming an energy retailer was not as easy as envisioned, as no proprietary off-the-shelf energy retail platform was readily available for use by community groups to on-sell energy to a local customer base from energy distributors. However we found that a social-enterprise based energy retail model was available through EnergyLocals which is making energy clean, cheap and fair for households and small businesses. For each customer that switches to their supply deal, a 'fee' is returned for community benefit associated with other sustainability or community-led projects.

Funding opportunities for a CORE Project Officer may be borne out of future Federal and State government support opportunities. The WMLIG Community Energy Scoping Paper will be used to provide reference material if a community energy proposal is pursued in the future in a partnership model with Local Government or local businesses / investors if strong community interest is forthcoming and it aligns to the strategic goals of WMLIG and other community organisations.

Due to COVID no community energy information events were held as planned.

More information

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