



Wednesday 26 July, 2013

RIVERINA COMMUNITY SOLAR FARMS LAUNCH POWERED BY SUPPORT FROM KEY LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The Riverina Community Solar Farm (RCSF) initiative was publically launched today, following a decision by Wagga Wagga City Council to provide 'in principle support' for the initiative at Monday night's council meeting .

Wagga Wagga City Council has agreed to provide its energy usage data and provide site access to enable solar experts to establish whether there is a sound economic and environmental case for Council to host a Community Owned Solar Farm.

The brainchild of local environmental organisation, Climate Rescue of Wagga Inc (CROW), The RCSF initiative aims to inspire the community to take responsibility for its energy needs by investing in solar farms which will provide clean energy and keep revenues generated from energy use in our local economy.

The RCSF initiative complements the sustainability objectives outlined in Council's **ten year Community Strategic Plan** which has been developed in line with government legislation.

Chair of CROW, Mr Stephen James, said he is delighted that Council has agreed to give the project its 'in principle support'.

"Council's ten year Community Strategic Plan has a number of sustainability objectives and the plan requires participation from our community to enable council to achieve those objectives," he said.

"This project will give people in our community an opportunity to play a role in ensuring the long term sustainability of our community."

"As a community working and living in a regional location, we need to take personal responsibility for our environment, our energy needs, our energy generation and our economy to ensure our long term sustainability. "

Riverina Community Solar Farms aim to find up to five hosts for solar systems in the 80 – 100KW size range. Each host will ideally consume at least 550-600kWh per day and would need about 600 square metres of roof or land space to house the required solar panels.

The solar panels and other technical equipment will be provided by a community-owned private company which would lock in long-term, low cost power agreements with the hosts.

Members of the community will be offered the opportunity to invest in the company and while the financial modelling is yet to be completed, it is envisaged that the initiative will offer investors fair financial returns that are 'better than bank interest rates'.

CROW has been in discussions with a range of local organisations to potentially become hosts for the project including Charles Sturt University, aged care facilities, hospitals, abattoirs, hotels and service clubs.

Mr James said he has been overwhelmed by the positive reception and constructive engagement he has encountered from local organisations.

"It demonstrates a true commitment by those organisations to reduce their carbon footprint in line with emerging legislation and contemporary views on responsible energy use," he said.

Australia is one of the best placed countries on earth to harness the energy of the sun, given the amount of sunshine we enjoy on an annual basis. Currently many local organisations use substantial amounts of power generated from fossil fuel and send considerable amounts of money out of the local economy to urban centres to pay for this energy. Many of these organisations do not have the available capital to invest in the solar equipment to harness the clean energy available from the sun.

A community owned solar farm eradicates the need for organisations to find the capital to pay for solar panels up front. The community invests in buying the technology and then earns a return on their investment through a long term, locked in energy contract with the host organisation charging cheaper than retail energy rates. The energy rates charged can be cheaper because they are generated and used on site and do not need to be transmitted through the power grid which immediately creates a saving of up to 17 cents per kilowatt.

Chair of CROW, Mr Stephen James said that RCSF is not just about generating more cost effective power.

"It's about embracing a more environmentally and economically sustainable power solution for our community," he said.

"We're looking for organisations to demonstrate leadership and their good corporate citizen credentials by adopting a power solution which will contribute to a better environment and a more sustainable community."

CROW is seeking expressions of interest from people interesting in making a \$2,000 - \$3,000 ethical investment. Interested parties can visit www.crow.org.au to register their details.

This project has been made possible through a grant provided by the NSW Department of Environment & Heritage.

- ends -

For further information, please contact:

Genevieve Smith
Mob 0414 848 846