

Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

Annual Report – May 2019

The year has been somewhat difficult with a President not being elected at the June 2018 AGM. Adding to this our Vice President Wendy Sherlock found her position resulted in conflicts of interest with her employment which were best resolved for her by resigning from the committee. We thank Wendy for her many years of dedication to BSFG through her work on the committee and as an office bearer.

After a very small attendance at our December general meeting the committee reviewed the number of meetings and arrived at a new schedule. There are now five General meetings on the fourth Thursday of March, May (AGM), July, September and November. There are still six committee meetings which will be held on the second Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October, and December. There will not be any meetings in January.

Action Groups.

Food Co-op Report

This month, the Benalla Food Co-operative will have been operating for exactly eight years. We started in May 2011 with 12 members, offering 20 different products and opening once per month. We used old wooden wardrobes for food storage and didn't have a computer. News spread mainly by word of mouth, along with an article in the Benalla Ensign. We now have 84 members, offer 115 products and recently commenced opening four times per month. In the coming month we will see our 4,000th customer shop at the food co-op. We have decided to celebrate our 8th year with a social function where we will share a meal and a recipe.

It is heartening to see many young families attend the Co-op. We all enjoy the many benefits of good quality food products, shopping in a relaxed friendly atmosphere and knowing we are contributing to less food miles and packaging, and where possible, supporting local producers.

Christine Holmes Food Co-op Coordinator

Plastic Wise Benalla

The "Plastic Wise Benalla" Sub-Committee spent the first half of the year continuing to upcycle unused or recycled fabric into reusable shopping bags. Our small team of dedicated volunteers undertook sewing either in the Drill Hall or in the comfort of their own homes. Approximately 250 bags were sold throughout the year with over 100 being sold at the Swanpool SCRAP Art Festival.

The Group has taken a break for the remainder of the year with two very dedicated ladies continuing to sew at home.

There may be potential in the near future for this Group to assist some keen young people to promote the reduction of plastic usage within Benalla.

If you would like to be involved in this Group please see Wendy Baker.

Wendy Baker, Coordinator

Benalla Local Food Network.

The Benalla Local Food Network has been meeting quarterly at the Farmer's Basket Café in Benalla. We have welcomed some new faces this year who are interested in promoting local food.

Kathryn and Larissa have been working with partner agencies on the North East Local Food Strategy 2018-2022 which is soon to be released. The plan aims to strengthen the local food system.

We welcomed Serenity Hill at the March general meeting who spoke about the Open Food Network and how other places in Australia are linking local food to local people!

We have also started a "Grow Free" cart inspired by the Grow Free project from South Australia. The cart is where people can swap their home grown fruit, vegetables and seedlings. It has been very popular over summer with plenty of tomatoes, cucumbers and fresh apples! The cart is located at the Ray Sweeney Centre 45 Coster St Benalla.

Kathryn McQualter, Dietitian, Allied Health, Coordinator

BSFG/REB Websites.

We have continued to develop and maintain the BSFG website over the year as the need arises. The Renewable Energy Benalla website was also launched during 2018.

The website stats for BSFG have reduced slightly over the twelve months however there has been a slow trend upwards for REB.

While stats are important the websites are also a good way to present information about our purpose, structure and our activities. With REB now looking after renewable energy there is scope for BSFG to focus on other areas of environmental sustainability. This could be done by new sections on the website. For instance we could develop online information on topics which could further inform and encourage local initiatives on topics such as agriculture, food, biodiversity, transport, but also a consideration of sustainable consumption, population, economic growth and limits to growth. This broadens the scope of our advocacy for environmental sustainability and informs the community about sustainable living

The BSFG website was launched in August 2015 so it has been online for nearly four years. Funding for the website until now was from a Benalla Rural City Community Grant we applied for in March 2015. The BSFG Weebly Pro Account for BSFG is due for renewal by 28 Sep 2019 at \$144 US plus GST for one year. Domain Registration of \$52 will be due by 11 October 2019. The REB Weebly Starter account is due for renewal by 20/6/2019 at \$96 US plus GST for one year. Domain registration is due by 12 June 2020.

Photo Journalist required! Photos taken at our events are a good way to show BSFG activities on our website. Is there a member who would be prepared to come along to events and take photos for use on our websites? For anyone with an interest in working on our websites there is also an opportunity to add content to our websites.

Peter is posting articles to our Facebook and twitter accounts on a regular basis.

Bev Lee and Peter Maddock, Coordinators

Renewable Energy Benalla (REB) Action Group

Renewable Energy Benalla Vision: For Benalla to become a zero net energy town by reducing and balancing energy demand with 100% renewable energy supply.

The last 12 months have been extremely busy for the Renewable Energy Benalla action group with monthly meetings to plan how to implement the *Benalla Stationary Energy Transition Strategy* that was developed with the support of Beyond Zero Emissions and launched in November 2017.

The transition strategy detailed three major strategies that need to be implemented to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve zero net energy. These strategies are:

- i) Energy efficiency measures to reduce energy use,
- ii) Promote and install local roof top solar,
- iii) Investigate utility scale renewables, battery storage and micro grids.

Along with these three strategies it will also be important to promote the vision and activities of Renewable Energy Benalla. Many homes and businesses have made great progress with increasing efficiencies and installing rooftop solar but many people aren't aware of the possibilities and the momentum for change that is developing. A critical activity will be to promote options and inform people so they support the change that is necessary and become active in achieving it.

In order to help promote Renewable Energy Benalla an REB website, www.reb.org.au has been established which is maintained by Bev Lee and Peter Maddock. Their work with the website is very much appreciated by members of the action group.

Renewable Energy Benalla also became incorporated in order to protect the name from any possible business starting up in Benalla who may have wanted to use that name.

Energy Efficiency

A number of sessions focussing on improving the energy efficiency of existing houses were conducted during 2018.

These sessions were advertised with the heading, *Reduce Energy Bills and Increase Thermal Comfort*, and covered the following topics:

Understanding your energy bills - electricity and gas; Energy Efficient Lighting; Draught Proofing; Insulation;

Windows: shading, coatings and films, and glazing; Efficient Hot Water Systems; Efficient Heating and Cooling Options. These sessions will be repeated again in 2019 and in following years to help achieve the goal of reducing energy demand by one third over ten years.

Promoting Roof Top Solar

As part of this strategy REB invited Mondo Power to make a solar panel and battery offer to the Benalla community which unfortunately was not accepted by the community. Discussions have been held with Mondo to review the reasons for the failure of this offer.

Community Energy Project

As part of promoting roof top solar REB has been investigating the establishment of a Community Energy Project based on donations from the community that would provide solar panels for community buildings such as kindergartens. In order to do this BSFG would need to establish a Benalla Renewable Energy Fund that community members could donate to? Community buildings would make repayments to this fund based on the savings they would make by having solar panels on their roof. This would mean that funds would again be available to install panels on another building.

Investigating Utility Scale Renewables

One member of the REB committee has been doing a lot of work investigating the possibility of establishing a regional utility scale waste to energy project in Benalla. A number of discussions have been held with Council staff about the feasibility of such a project. Further investigation and discussion with council will continue.

Involvement with Beyond Zero Emissions

I attended the BZE AGM in Melbourne as an invited guest speaker and gave an overview of REB activities.

The Beyond Zero Emissions Electrifying Industry Report was presented to a small group of regional people on 26th March. Vanessa Petrie, CEO of BZE travelled to Benalla to present the report.

Grant Applications

Renewable Energy Benalla has submitted applications for two different grants.

a) Hume Region Community Renewable Energy Mini-Grants

This grants program aims to support communities to engage members of their communities in activities or events which raise awareness and understanding of renewable energy opportunities. An application titled "Engaging Benalla in a Renewable Energy Future" was submitted. The grant sought was for \$2915 for the design and printing of a range of communication materials to assist REB raise its profile and increase engagement with the wider Benalla community. Benalla Sustainable Future Group was nominated as the lead agency as REB does not have a bank account. This application was successful and the moneys will be paid into the BSFG bank account.

b) Victorian Community Climate Change Adaptation Grants (3CA Grants)

The 3CA Grants program aims to support practical projects focused on adaptation activities with clear community benefit. Discussions were held with Goulbourn Valley Community Energy (GVCE) about a joint application to thermally upgrade low income housing by improving draught proofing and insulation to make them more energy efficient and more thermally comfortable.

A joint application for \$100,000 titled '*Adapting Community Housing for Climate Change*' has been made with GVCE nominated as the lead organisation. If the application is successful GVCE will handle the financial aspects.

The submission involves conducting assessments of 50 houses owned or managed by community housing organisations, 25 in Benalla and 25 in Goulburn Valley, and then carrying out retrofits of those houses. In Benalla we will focus on houses managed by *Beyond Housing*.

Announcement of successful grant submissions will be made by the end of May.

Community Engagement to help Achieve our Vision

A plan to achieve zero net energy by 2028 is an ambitious and complex task. REB need more people from the community to assist with implementing the Transition Strategy. This may be to help with a small distinctive task or to become involved in the organisation of a specific event or project.

REB is currently investigating ways to improve our engagement with the Benalla community and to encourage people to become involved in achieving 100% renewables by 2028. The successful application for a grant to develop communication materials will help with this process.

John Lloyd, Convenor, Renewable Energy Benalla

Bike Action Group

This group has not been active in the past twelve months. Thank you to Mike Hillenaar for initiating this group and representing BSFG on the Council Pathways to the Future (Foot & Cycle Paths) project.

Sustainable Building Action Group.

This group has not been active in the past twelve months. However a working group from Renewable Energy Benalla conducted a number of sessions on increasing the energy efficiency of existing buildings and are planning to repeat these again this year.

BSFG member Howard Bartlett had his house open again this year for Sustainable House Day.

Swanpool Environmental Film Festival.

The seventh Swanpool Environmental Film Festival will screen this year on Saturday June 15th. Ian Herbert has again been directing and coordinating the running of this year's festival. The festival is a joint effort between Swanpool Landcare and BSFG and will be held on Saturday June 15th from 1.30pm to 9.40pm at Swanpool Cinema.

Session 1 Film 'System Error', Session 2 Short Enviro Film Fest and Session 3 Film '2040'.

Guest speakers are Dr Tilman Ruff AM. Tilman is Associate Professor at Melbourne University's School of Population and Global Health. Prof Samantha Hepburn Director of Deakin's Centre for Energy and Natural Resources, Professor of Property Law at Deakin Law School. Prof Tim Reeves who was recently appointed first Professor in Residence at the Dookie agricultural campus. Tim is a distinguished international leader in agricultural research, development and extension.

\$30 ticket also includes afternoon tea and dinner by the Swanpool Catering Team.

Guest Speakers.

We again had some interesting guest speakers during the year. In August, FRV Services Sarah Stent and Avantika Basu provided an update on the 85MW Winton Solar Farm. In October, we screened the film takayna/Tarkine from Patagonia Films about protecting the Tarkine in Tasmania, followed by the song Sacred performed by jazz singer Elly Hoyt. In December, we had a number of short films; Right to Repair, David Attenborough at COP24, Greta Thunberg's UN Speech at COP24, and David Holmgren on Retro Suburbia. About 47 minutes total.

In March, Serenity Hill spoke to a well-attended meeting about the Open Food Network, a distributed online marketplace making food fair.

Our 2019 AGM guest speaker is Lance Lloyd, Restoration Scientist with the Winton Wetlands Committee of Management.

Support for Shannon Loughnanes Extremely Long Walk.

Shannon Loughnane approached BSFG via our website in late February seeking support on his Extremely Long Walk for Climate Action by collecting signatures for his petition to Parliament in Canberra calling for stronger action on climate change including the declaration of a climate emergency.

We organised an event to welcome Shannon to Benalla on Saturday April 27th. Mayor Scott Upston welcomed Shannon to Benalla at the John Cooper Hall, Benalla Uniting Church. Benalla Rural City provided a sponsorship grant of \$500 to cover hall hire, catering and printing. After this event BSFG members David and Kay Blore hosted Shannon for the night and we thank them for accommodating Shannon for the night.

The Food Co-op collected petition signatures on open days and we also collected signatures at our stall at The Source event on Saturday March 23rd and at the Lakeside Market on the day of Shannon's arrival in Benalla.

Shannon made it to Canberra on time and we believe he has been devastated by the outcome of the federal election.

This event was well covered by Simon Rupert from The Ensign. WinTV also filmed the event with footage of Shannon arriving at the Uniting Church and of the Welcome meeting.

Support from Council.

BSFG is grateful for the continued support received from Council. A Council Community Grant in 2015 enabled us to develop and establish the BSFG website and has funded the site until September 2019. A \$500 Sponsorship Grant enabled us to arrange the Welcome to Benalla event for Shannon Loughnane. And Council has allocated time by Larissa Montgomery, council's Environmental Sustainability Coordinator to assist John Lloyd with Renewable Energy Benalla.

Advocacy

During the year BSFG has forwarded information about many issues we feel are important to take action on. Often members and contacts may receive this information by other means however we send this because we think our advocacy role is important and we encourage you to support these actions.

BSFG could be looking at promoting a broader view of sustainable living topics such as agriculture, food, biodiversity, transport, but also a consideration of sustainable consumption, population, economic growth and limits to growth. Members are welcome to initiate action groups.

Membership.

This year our membership has dropped slightly to 50. The number of people on our contact list to receive BSFG information continues to expand through both Food Co-op members and registrations via the website.

The committee has decided that membership fees should remain at \$25 per household for one year or \$60 for three years, with a \$5 discount available for those who are also a member of the Bulk Food Cooperative. However a \$5 membership for students 18 years and under is now available.

Committee.

This year has been a difficult one. We are thankful for Wendy Sherlock's support and direction until her resignation early this year. We have made an effort to make members aware that we need support to keep BSFG operational. This has resulted in a number of members indicating they would be happy to assist on the committee, ensuring that we are hopeful of electing all office bearers and committee at the AGM. The elections will again be conducted by Mayor Scott Upston.

We are pleased however that this year John Lloyd now has more time to devote to Renewable Energy Benalla which you will see from his REB report has been a very busy one.

Newsletter.

Christine Holmes surveyed members about the Newsletter during the year. We were encouraged by the positive survey response which indicated members wished to see the Newsletter continue largely in its established format. Some members also expressed an interest in contributing an article to the Newsletter.

Our next newsletter is due in June so if you have or can write an article please submit to me by the end of May (peter_maddock@iprimus.com.au).

In Closing

The committee look forward to seeing all office bearers and committee elected at the AGM. Although hopeful of more action being taken on climate change following this election we know continued advocacy will be required for action on climate change and many other pressing environmental issues.

We encourage members to involve themselves in our activities and meetings. There are action groups you could be involved in. Or you may have something you would like to initiate yourself. You might also have a skill, or develop a skill to assist BSFG with its work, such as promotion, website development, article writing and advocacy.

Please contact me for more information or to discuss becoming more involved with BSFG. For the Committee.

Peter Maddock.

Secretary.

0418 135 330