

Victorian Renewable Energy Scheme Consultation

Submission by Voices of the Valley Inc.

Voices of the Valley is a community group working towards a transition plan for the Latrobe Valley. The plan is based on a Transition Centre that would coordinate manufacturing of solar panels, storage batteries and other new technology, installation and maintenance of renewable energy harvesters, research, education, an energy retailer and a worker and community support centre.



Figure 1 The Latrobe Valley Transition Centre model

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute in the consultation process. The comments we make are based on what we see as the particular needs of the Latrobe Valley, but may have broader relevance.

Scheme Structure

Voices of the Valley considers that provision should be made for community energy projects in the auction process. As communities vary in size and hence demand, it would be desirable that there be a variable capacity category in one of the tranches to allow for bids from community owned energy projects.

Regarding the proportion of scheme generation that should be dedicated to solar projects, Voices of the Valley would argue that specific provision should be made for hybrid projects using more than one form of energy harvesting. We are currently researching the idea of a virtual power station similar to the King Island Renewable Energy Integration Project.

Other matters the State should consider? We think storage and conditioning of energy should be an essential part of a renewable energy scheme. We need to think of new forms of organising power harvesting and distribution. A model which attempts to simply substitute wind (or solar) for coal generated power would be a wasted opportunity.

Payment Structure

Voices of the Valley continues to develop our Transition Centre model and will be interested in financing in the future. One of our basic principles is that the transition process in the Latrobe Valley needs to be owned by the people but supported by the State and Federal Government. Our concept rests on the idea of community, or cooperative ownership of a micro grid linking energy harvesting with an energy retailer to support the community, build jobs and support research to further develop energy harvesting and storage. The auctions are an opportunity to finance such a model as part of a transition plan for the Latrobe Valley.

Administration and cost recovery

Voices of the Valley is very firmly of the opinion that administration of the renewable energy auction scheme should be in the hands of a statutory body independent of the political cycle and independent of current privately owned electricity distribution and transmission businesses.

The costs of privatisation are only too apparent in the Latrobe Valley, even now. Our transition project is an attempt to return some ownership and control of our lives and our future to the people who live here. The disadvantages of private ownership are clearly demonstrated in both the power and transportation industries, where various functions that need to be coordinated and integrated to work to the benefit of users, consumers have been separated and are owned by different bodies. The result has been a decline in maintenance, a practice of waiting until something breaks down before fixing it, rather than routine preventative maintenance, and a marked increase in cost and decline in service in the name of efficiency. Voices of the Valley holds the position that the renewable energy scheme provides an opportunity to make the needs of the people who need a service a priority over profits of shareholders.

An independent State authority can set up best practice taking account of all interests.

Manufacturing our own renewable energy is extremely important for Victoria and Voices of the Valley believe that this could be part of a Just Transition for the Latrobe Valley that we are made the centre for renewable energies, this could be a great example of the State Government looking at what has been the power hub for Victoria and moving it from the old to the new.

Evaluation

Voices of the Valley believes that there are many variables when it comes to evaluation of products and the process set down needs to be carefully considered when being set in place. Victoria has

many communities that are playing a large part in what the future can be for their community, these communities have great people and ideas and are prepared to be part of the needed change, often communities given a chance have their own solutions to problems they should be encouraged to be involved and the process should be made easier for these group. The social and economic benefit is definitely a factor that needs to be considered.

"Prioritising community involvement in the evaluation criteria will give renewable energy companies clarity about how to create real local benefits with communities and provide the industry with stronger community support"

Voices of the Valley continues to work towards transitioning the Latrobe Valley for the benefit of our community. Thank you for considering our recommendations on the design of the renewable energy auction scheme and we look forward to working with the state Government on this and other projects.

Best wishes,

Wendy Farmer

Voices of the Valley

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