

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

Research Questions

1. **What are the outcomes & impacts of community owned wind energy projects in small regional communities?**
2. **How do different legal structures, community engagement practices & economic arrangements influence impacts & outcomes?**
3. **What insight does present for the potential opportunities for CORE in small regional communities?**

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



Methodology

Qualitative methods are used to explore the experiences and perceptions of people living in four communities who have successfully established community owned wind energy projects. Through fieldwork involving semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups & participant observation over a period of two weeks the researcher is able to access a depth of knowledge & experience of this form of community owned renewable energy.

Four case studies – Hepburn Wind & Denmark Community Windfarm from Australia and Shapinsay Development Trust & Skye Renewables Cooperative from Scotland - form the basis of this analysis into the ways in which diverse community engagement practices, legal structures & economic arrangements affect the various social, environmental & economic impacts & outcomes of the projects in their communities.

Project Status

Projects Fieldwork was completed in September 2015. The researcher is now collating & analysing field data.

Literature Review

CORE projects take many forms, from 50kW through to 20MW, across the spectrum of RE technologies & using many different legal structures - from cooperatives, to trusts, to companies.

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

Processes - on-going opportunities for community participation in decisions, including the ability to shape the project to local needs & values.

Outcomes - economic & social benefits are shared with local shareholders & the broader community.

Preliminary Results

CORE projects produce a range of social, economic & environmental outcomes & impacts in the local communities in which they are hosted & beyond. Some of these are unique from other forms of RE development, including:

- Increased awareness & knowledge of RE & energy generally;
- Increased local economic benefit per MW installed;
- Changes in personal sense of self, connection with community & relationship with technology, especially increased positive association with wind turbines;
- Increased local sense of empowerment & autonomy, partly through capacity development & local decision making processes;
- Increased participation in local & broader policy processes.

Figure 2: Shapinsay Development Trust's 900kW turbine 'Whirly'. Sale of electricity generates \$120,000 per year for community projects.



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

Anticipated impacts

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

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