



National Centre for
Sustainability



Hopetoun Community Sustainable Energy Initiative

15% of crop residue could provide enough electricity for Hopetoun

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Opportunities to provide electricity for Hopetoun from crop residue was discussed at an exciting workshop at Gateway BEET on Monday last week. Plant matter, such as crop and tree prunings, can be used to create bioenergy, which is a renewable form of electricity.

Preliminary research findings of the Hopetoun Community Sustainable Energy Initiative (HCSEI) indicate that if the community used a small proportion of crop residue (around 15%) within a 15km radius of Hopetoun this would be enough to provide electricity for the town. This 15% of crop residue would amount to approximately 40,000 tonnes which is enough to run a 4MW bioenergy facility per year.

Participants from the workshop heard from Andrew Lang, Chairman of the SMARTtimbers Cooperative in Victoria, who is passionate about bioenergy. Andrew has travelled overseas on a Churchill Fellowship to learn about bioenergy, and he presented a number of real life examples of where bioenergy is currently being used to meet the electricity and heating needs of towns, particularly in the Scandinavian countries. Whilst in Australia bioenergy is used extensively in sugar cane country (where the cropping waste is known as bagasse), it has not been used significantly with other sources of plant matter.

Roy Latta, from DPI at Walpeup, talked at the workshop about the issue of crop management and opportunities to ensure biomass supply for the facility and to avoid negative impacts on land health and soil condition. Other speakers included Mark Barber from Sustainability Victoria who talked about funding opportunities, in particular the Renewable Energy Support Fund, and Dave Watson from UB talked about training and skill needs for the community.

During the workshop some lively discussions were held into different aspects of bioenergy, including the potential to use current crops or alternative crops, and other benefits of the facility to the community. The workshop was attended by a number of local community members and farmers as well as representatives from the University

of Ballarat, Department of Primary Industries, WIDCORP, Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water, Ararat Shire Council and Sustainability Victoria.

Whilst the findings in relation to bioenergy so far are positive, any future facility for the town would need to be financial viable and sustainable for the community, e.g. consistent with sustainable farming practices and providing job opportunities.

A number of options for renewable energy for Hopetoun (such as wind, solar and biomass) are being explored through the Hopetoun Community Sustainable Energy Initiative research project. The project is being funded by Sustainability Victoria and is expected to be completed in the next few months. The report will provide an overview of the opportunities and pros and cons of each renewable energy option, including an assessment of costs and social and environmental outcomes.

Do you have any questions about the project?

Send them in to the Hopetoun Courier via email hcourier@iinet.net.au or ring them through on 5083 3544 and we will respond to your questions in the next update.