

COMMUNITY ENERGY CONGRESS

MELBOURNE 2017

SUMMARY REPORT

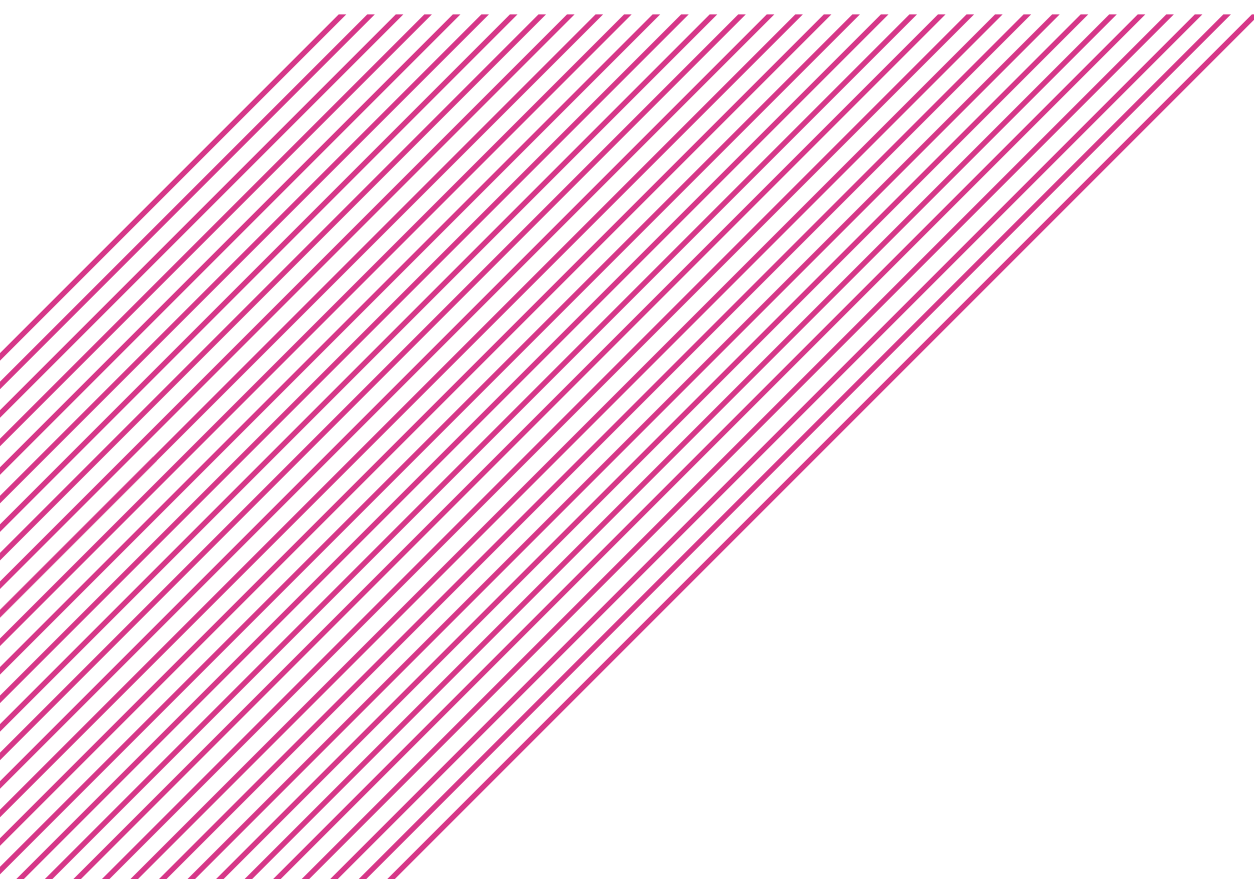


C4CE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY
ENERGY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Congress Organisers would like to acknowledge that the Community Energy Congress is being held on the lands of the Kulin Nation, and pay our respect to elders of the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Taungurong, Dja Dja Wurrung and the Wathaurung people, both past and present. We acknowledge the First Australians as the traditional custodians of this continent, whose cultures are among the oldest living cultures in human history.



CONGRESS BY NUMBERS

620

ATTENDEES

150

MEDIA HITS

71

SPEAKERS

40

SIDE EVENTS

35

VOLUNTEERS

34

SPONSORS
& PARTNERS

25

ABORIGINAL
LEADERS

17

EXHIBITION
STANDS

12

BREAKOUT
SESSIONS

5

PLENARIES

4

INTERNATIONAL
SPEAKERS

4

POLITICAL
LEADERS

2

COFFEE
CARTS

1

JAZZ
BAND

1

ORGANIST

INTRODUCTION

The second Community Energy Congress was held at Melbourne Town Hall on February 27-28, 2017. Organised by the Coalition for Community Energy (C4CE), Congress 2017 brought people from across the country together to discuss how to strengthen Australia's growing community energy sector and make the transition to clean energy faster and fairer for all.

The Congress aims were to:

- Inspire participants to create change in their communities;
- Develop skills and build capacity to deliver a community energy project;
- Develop pathways for communities, businesses, and local and state government to collaborate;
- Identify key opportunities and barriers facing the sector;
- Learn from successful examples of community energy;
- Facilitate sharing of information and strategies about overcoming the barriers and realising opportunities;
- Consolidate and coordinate efforts across the nation in this emerging sector; and
- Foster new networks and relationships.

C4CE is proud to call Congress 2017 an overwhelming success: 84% of respondents said they left the Congress feeling excited and inspired, with 92% reporting they felt better equipped to engage and progress community energy action.

This report provides a summary of who attended Congress 2017, what they experienced, together with key highlights, outcomes and achievements.

"The Congress has given me hope that we can make the required transition to renewable energy in our communities."



CONGRESS ATTENDANCE

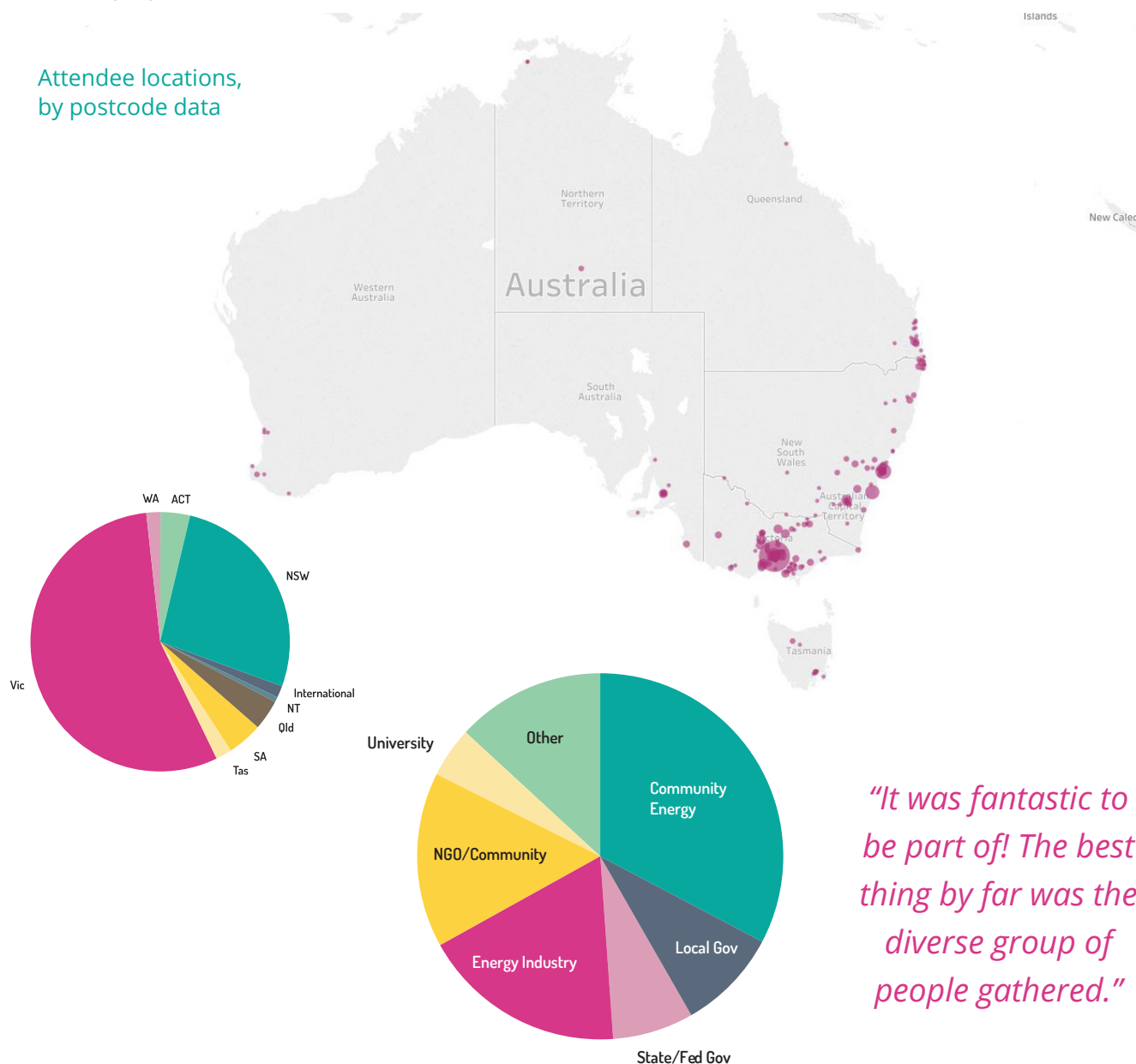
Congress 2017 was attended by 620 people across the two days, almost double that of the first Congress in 2014. When combined with the numbers for the 40 side events (including the speaking tours of our four international keynote speakers), well over 2000 people directly attended an event associated with Congress 2017.

Participants came from every state and territory in Australia, with approximately half coming from Victoria. In addition there were eight international delegates from Canada, Denmark, Japan, the UK, the US and Brazil.

The largest category of attendees was, unsurprisingly, community energy groups (49%), followed by NGOs and community support organisations (30%) and business attendees.

Participants mainly heard about the Congress through their community energy groups or wider network (69%). Other important channels included the C4CE website or newsletter (34%) and social media (7%).

Attendee locations,
by postcode data



"It was fantastic to be part of! The best thing by far was the diverse group of people gathered."

CONGRESS PROGRAM & SIDE EVENTS

Participants to the Community Energy Congress were welcomed by the wonderful sounds of the Southern Hemisphere's largest instrument - the Melbourne Town Hall organ. As one participant said "Boy did that set the mood!"

The exchange of ideas, aspirations, practical techniques and business cards began almost immediately, cascading into highly engaged discussions and vigorous debate that would define the jam-packed Congress. The Program was designed to facilitate practical outcomes towards a faster and fairer transition to clean energy, and was structured around four main themes:

GETTING IT DONE

From Søren Hermansen's opening keynote address that inspired participants with how his community of Samsø in Denmark made their vision for a 100% renewable island a reality, the tone was set. Sessions on stories of successful Australian community energy projects followed, alongside workshops and training on the practical aspects of implementing viable community energy models right now: legals, finance, risk, donation models, household bulk-buys, media training and how to engage one's community. A range of side-events also fed into this theme, from Speed Dating Community Energy experts, to the Finance Toolkit launch and training, to an introduction to how the energy system works.

"From go to wow, I learnt about all the dos and don'ts for starting a community solar project."

ENERGY JUSTICE

Energy justice was a highlight for many Congress participants. From the second plenary that saw 13 Aboriginal leaders along with Melina Laboucan-Massimo and Chief Gordon Planes from Canada take the stage to share their inspiring though challenging stories, to the launch of a new First Nation's Renewable Energy Alliance in the final plenary, practical steps were taken to make a Just Transition a reality. In addition, Candace Valhsing Obama's Senior Energy Advisor spoke of how the US Government put policies in place to ensure the most vulnerable are being empowered with solar and discussions were had as to how to follow suit in Australia. Those communities affected by fossil fuels also met to talk about how renewable energy can be part of a story of hope.

"The Energy Justice plenary was extremely powerful and made me realise the transformational possibilities of community energy."



PARTNERSHIPS

As community energy becomes more established, the interest from more mainstream energy actors is increasing. This theme saw sessions and side events on how communities are partnering with renewable energy developers, retailers, councils and network companies, discussing how new approaches can be developed that unlock benefit for all involved.

"Full of ideas and experience. Good to know we're not alone."

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES

The Congress showed that more than ever that community energy actors are looking to the future. Sessions on new technologies and models inspired many, with a particular focus on unlocking Solar Gardens, local energy trading, community pumped hydro and more. A focus on what governments and political leaders can do to unlock community energy was also on the agenda with action taken to help win Regional Energy Hubs, as well as speeches from Victorian Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio and representatives from the ACT, South Australia, NSW and ARENA.

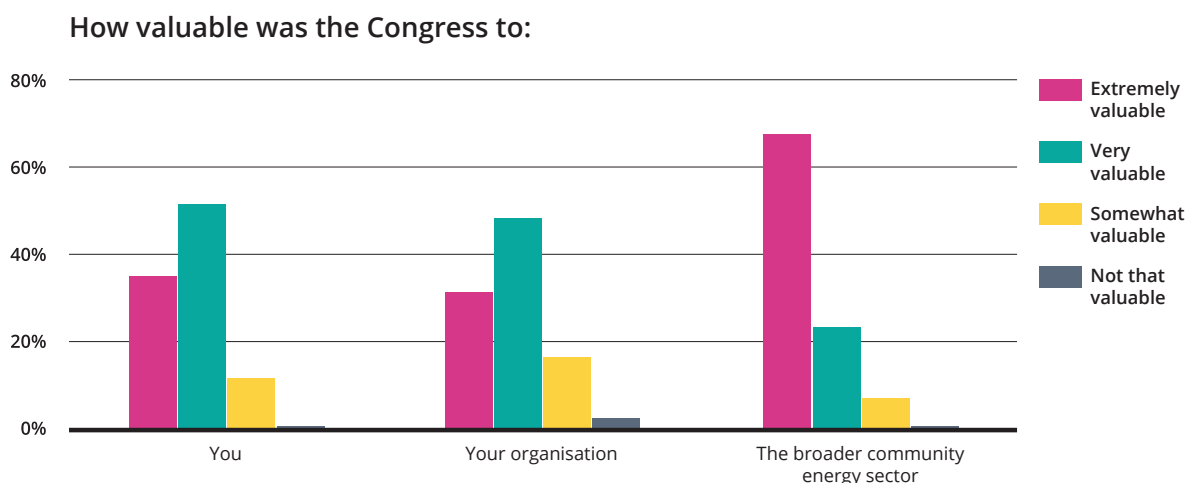
"Bloody brilliant! Wish I had a clone so I could have attended everything."

The [full program](#) consisted of a mixture of plenaries, breakout sessions, and open space, with over 70 presenters, of whom approximately half were women.

The main program was complemented by 40 side events. It was exciting to see so many people and organisations help make Congress 2017 a stand-out moment, while also strengthening their work. This included Future Super's launch of their Renewable Energy Investment Fund, presentations from community energy Churchill Fellows Heather Smith and Chris Cooper, and a series of community energy events at the Sustainable Living Festival to name a few. Highlight side-events included the speaking tours by Søren Hermansen (over 16 events in NSW, regional Victoria, ACT and SA) and our three other international keynote speakers.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The feedback from Congress participants was overwhelmingly positive. For example, when asked about the how valuable they thought the Congress was, the vast majority responded positively, with more than 2/3 of the delegates saying that it was extremely useful for the community energy sector.



There was shared agreement among the delegates that the diversity at the Congress including the wide range of people, organisations and information provided was its greatest asset. Other highlights included:

- Connecting with new people
- The range of visionary as well as practical knowledge and information sharing sessions, and
- The high quality of the presenters. Many attendees especially loved the keynote speaker Søren Hermansen and his insights into the transformation of the Danish island of Samsø to be powered by 100% renewables.

"We have so many resources available from previous successful projects, we don't need to reinvent the wheel. Momentum is now unstoppable!"

While the diversity was a broadly recognised strength of the Congress, it also brought challenges. For example, there were people with different levels of knowledge, so it was sometimes difficult to pitch group conversations at the right level.

The focus on Aboriginal community energy was acknowledged by most as 'extremely powerful', and the launch of the First Nation's Renewable Energy Alliance the standout impact of the Congress. This wouldn't have been possible without 25 First Nation's leaders making the journey to Melbourne. However, as the Congress showed, making big steps forward, particularly on issues of justice does not happen to a schedule, as such, we want to thank everyone involved, for their participation, respect and patients.

"The Aboriginal sessions were incredible."

No matter how successful an event is there is always room for improvement. The Congress organising team, thanks to the generous feedback, has identified four main areas to focus on for the next Congress.

Venue. Holding Congress 2017 at Melbourne Town Hall gave the event a sense of grandeur and occasion. However, there were some challenges, including acoustics, lack of internet and room sizes. In addition, at the next Congress it will be important to ensure the Expo is held in a location more immediately obvious and accessible to participants.

Technology. While some presenters appreciated the technology-based participant feedback provided through Sli.do, we acknowledge it was not accessible for everyone and the facilitators had to take steps to receive feedback via other methods during the congress. At the next Congress we will put in place mechanisms to ensure that everyone is able to participate and provide feedback to presenters.

Program. A common theme in the feedback, was that people felt there was not enough time for socialising and networking. Since one of the most important aspects of the Congress is the opportunity to make new contacts, socialising and networking will be given higher priority and more time at the next Congress.

Leveraging impact. We were excited to launch the next phase of the Smart Energy Communities Campaign in the closing plenary of the Congress, with over 100 letters sent to politicians. However, participants felt that more could be done at such a large event to maximise our political impact.



CONGRESS OUTPUTS

While the Congress was a moment in time, many of the ideas and information presented have been captured for posterity through a range of mediums.

Medium

Outputs



Video

[Congress 2017 highlights video](#)
[Videos of presentations given in the Main Hall](#)



Photos

Selected photo highlights featured on the [Congress website](#)
1000+ photos on the [C4CE Flickr page](#)



Presentations

[Presentations from speakers](#) (where we have permission)



Cartoons

[A series of 15 cartoons](#) by Sam Wallman capturing key ideas from the Congress



Podcasts

[Voices of Community Energy](#) is a new community energy podcast network, launched at the Congress



"I learned a great deal from people I talked to and it was a great experience."

CONGRESS MEDIA

Congress 2017 received over 150 media hits including the following:



TV

4 TV stories including:

- SBS News, [Indigenous Communities Embrace Renewable Energy Technologies](#)
- ABC 7PM News, Renewable energy becomes accessible to community groups through people power



Radio

60 radio stories, including segments on SBS, a number of community radio stations and ABC radio in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, AM, South West WA and Canberra.



Print & Online

55 unique print and online stories and Op Eds syndicated to over 62 news outlets, including:

- The Conversation, [Why we need an energy Landcare to tackle rising power prices](#)
- The Age, [Renewable power to the people could reap profits in Victoria](#)
- AAP/Herald Sun, [Straw could replace coal](#)
- ABC Online, [Renewable energy installed by community groups via crowdfunding](#)
- Fifth Estate, [Australia's First Nation's form new alliance for renewable energy](#)

The C4CE website has a [full-list of Congress media](#).

"It's such an inspiring movement, for which I have nothing but respect. I can't wait to see where we get to in 5, 10, 20 years. I want my kids to live in a just society with a sense of community."

ORGANISING THE CONGRESS

Congress 2017 was organised by the Coalition for Community Energy (C4CE). The main Congress logistics were undertaken by C4CE Secretariat Community Power Agency and conference organiser Catalyst Events, with media support by the Climate Media Centre.

We particularly acknowledge the Alternative Technology Association, the Institute for Sustainable Futures, Hepburn Wind, Moreland Energy Foundation and the Valley Centre who all led organising of different aspects of the Congress. Without their contributions Congress 2017 would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank our other partner organisations: Clean Energy Council, Solar Citizens, Sustainable Living Festival and the Australian Wind Alliance, who's involvement and promotion of Congress 2017 spread the word and the impact far and wide.

"Great to see lots of young women in such strong leadership positions. Very well organised event, well done."

STAY IN TOUCH

We will be holding the next Community Energy Congress in the next two years. If you would like to be involved in or receive notices about the next Congress and what's happening across the Australian community energy sector, stay in touch by contacting Secretariat@c4ce.net.au, joining the C4CE mailing list: www.c4ce.net.au/contact or following us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#): @c4ceau.

"Friendliest conference I've been to!"



FUNDING

With the aid of significant in-kind time contributions from Partner Organisations, Congress 2017 made a small surplus. This will seed-fund the 3rd Community Energy Congress and provide a small amount of core funding to the Coalition for Community Energy.

In total \$314,100 was raised to cover core costs of delivering Congress 2017 and at least an additional \$70,000 was raised for Aboriginal participation at the Congress and side event (see breakdown in Table 3).

Note these figures do not include the huge amount of in-kind time provided by partner organisations or the cost of the two Social Events which were provided by Future Super and Geli in-kind.

Income Stream	Amount (Incl. GST)
Registrations*	\$154,500
Sponsorship**	\$228,800
Stalls	\$800
Total	\$384,100

* Of this \$10,000 came from registration for Congress side events, the remainder from the Congress itself. This includes subsidised registrations provided by New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage, Sustainability Victoria, the Tasmanian Office of Climate Change, South Australian Government, City of Melbourne and Future Super

** Of this \$60,000 was raised for key side events and aspects of the Congress. For example, Speed Dating, Aboriginal Participation, Søren Hermansen's Speaking Tour and the Hepburn Wind Side Event.

THANKS GO TO OUR SPONSORS

Platinum: The Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Yingli, Future Super, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Energy Locals and the City of Melbourne

Silver: Sustainability Victoria

Bronze: Infigen, Bank Australia, Powershop, Greensync, Norton Rose Fulbright, the GreenPower Program, Canadian Solar, Canadian Consulate, Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals, Flex, EU Centre on Shared Complex Challenges & Geli

As well as a number of additional funders who provided funding for specific aspects of the Congress, but requested not to be named.

*Thank you to everyone ~
participants, sponsors,
organisers, partners and
supporters ~ who contributed to
making the second Community
Energy Congress a memorable
moment in driving a faster and
fairer transition to clean energy
in Australia.*



c4ce.net.au/congress