

APPENDIX B - STRATEGIC INITIATIVES - STATUS AND ACTIONS

This document outlines the current status and proposes next steps for each of the 34 strategic initiatives outlined in the National Community Energy Strategy.

It should be noted that the majority, though not all, of the proposed next actions to progress the priority initiatives outlined below will need resourcing. The Coalition for Community Energy (C4CE), will work with its now 50 member groups, funders and other stakeholders to advance initiatives where a) it is identified as a priority to progress the community energy sector in the immediate context, b) there are organisations interested in pursuing it and c) there is a funding avenue to be pursued. This prioritisation process will evolve over time and will be coordinated by the C4CE Secretariat and Steering Group. However, clearly it is beyond the scope for any one organisation or coalition to deliver all of the priority initiatives. While C4CE will action some, the best outcome would see many actors contributing to the delivery of the aspects of the National Strategy that fit with their interests and skills.

Sub-strategy 1: Models of community energy

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
1. Promote viable community energy models.	Started, through the Behind the Meter Solar Resources (Appendix D) developed in the National Strategy project. These will be uploaded to the Embark Wiki and disseminated through the Coalition for Community Energy.	Ensure that as new models are developed and become viable, similar supporting resources are developed and disseminated. Develop a training and mentoring program on selected Behind the Meter Solar models, to ensure that viable models are replicated in new communities.
2. Create resources that assist community groups to decide which model to adopt or to develop a new model.	Started, through the Behind the Meter Solar Resources – Decision Flow Chart (Appendix D). The Community Energy Finance Toolkit project proposal currently with ARENA will also help assist with this.	Ensure this decision flow chart gets updated as new models are developed. Undertake the Community Energy Finance Toolkit project if it is approved and ensure that the toolkit helps achieve this initiative aim of helping groups decide which model to adopt.
3. Encourage and promote community-developer partnership models of community energy.	There is one operating (ClearSky Solar Investment) and potentially three community-developer partnership models of community energy in development (CENREC/Infigen, and possibly Canooer Bridge and Chepstowe). However, a strategic initiative to help progress and mainstream this approach has not been initiated.	Work with CENREC and Infigen to ensure the project proceeds. Encourage Canooer Bridge and Chepstow to pursue a community partnership and supply them with resources where appropriate. Support other groups to use or adapt the ClearSky Solar Investment model (see Appendix E). Identify and work with both other communities and other renewable energy developers who would be interested in trialling a community-developer partnership. Continue to promote to state governments the Danish and UK policy of mandating a certain proportion of a large renewable energy development be opened up for community ownership.

Sub-strategy 1: Models of community energy

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
4. Support the development of new energy efficiency, demand management, storage, bioenergy, thermal network and small hydro based models of community energy.	<p>The NSW Government in their recent grant round have provided funding to three groups developing bioenergy models community energy – Nimbin Neighbourhood Centre, CLEAN Cowra and Manilla Community Solar. Many community generation projects also include energy efficiency either as a community education component or as part of a solar assessment for a potential community solar host site.</p> <p>Also the Z-NET project, based in the New England, is developing a new town-based model of community energy.</p>	<p>Continue to support groups to innovate and develop new models covering these approaches and incorporate support for community energy model innovation as part of any policy work.</p> <p>Develop and promote existing resources on community wide demand management and energy efficiency programs, such as the Central Victorian Solar Cities and Denmark Warpole Green Towns programs.</p>
5. Support community energy groups in setting up and developing community off-grid or micro-grid systems and business models.	<p>Research has been undertaken by ATA and Energy for the People into the economics of community micro-grids. Also, the NSW government has just funded research into the feasibility and operations of community micro-grids and off-grid models at Narara Ecovillage, Tyalgun and Cowra as part of its Growing Community Energy Grant Program.</p>	<p>Support the existing projects in development.</p> <p>Consolidate the findings from the current suite of funded projects with the existing knowledge base and incorporate into a resource for all community energy groups.</p> <p>Build or bring-in specialist capacity in organisations supporting community groups looking to develop micro-grid and off-grid projects.</p>
6. Develop models of community energy based on Environmental Upgrade Agreements.	<p>Moreland Energy Foundation has pioneered this approach in partnership with Darebin Council, particularly targeting low income households. Funding has been provided by the NSW OEH to look at how that model could be adapted for the NSW context.</p>	<p>Deliver the NSW EUA adaptation project and report on what needs to change to ensure this mechanism can work in NSW. Trial a residential EUA (or council rates-backed finance) community energy project in NSW. Document the models that emerge and support community energy groups, councils and other state governments to adopt the necessary policy changes and apply the model in communities.</p>
7. Develop a community energy business model that works regardless of government policy.	<p>Donation crowdfunding models of community energy are successfully rolling out in many communities. The CORENA donation model has been documented as part of Appendix E.</p>	<p>Document other donation models and disseminate the information widely.</p> <p>Continue to support community energy groups to reduce their costs and thus make themselves less reliant on government funding. Also work with private sector organisations to develop new and bigger behind the meter models of community energy.</p>

Sub-strategy 2: Funding and Finance

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
1. Support and further develop community energy grant funding.	C4CE commissioned modelling of the impact of a dedicated community energy grant fund. The NSW Government has undertaken two community energy grant rounds and the Victorian government has provided three community energy grants (to Hepburn Wind, and most recently Woodend and Newstead). Also a number of philanthropists have supported the set-up of new community energy models – Repower Shoalhaven and Sydney Renewable Power Company models specifically.	To investigate bundling together a number of community energy projects into a single grant application to ARENA. Continue to work with State Governments to deliver community energy grant programs. Continue to work with philanthropists to ensure philanthropic funding is achieving the greatest impact.
2. Increase community energy groups' competence in fundraising.	A crowd funding training session was held during the Community Energy Congress.	Deliver this crowd funding training again at a state-level. Develop a case-study of a community energy group has successfully undertaken crowd funding for project development costs of a larger community energy project (as opposed to crowd funding to cover the cost of installing a small PV array, of which there are already many examples).
3. Work with investors to develop a revolving finance fund.	Work has been done to engage with finance institutions such as Bendigo Bank, Bank MECU, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, Social Enterprise Finance Australia, to build their understanding of the community energy sector.	This initiative is important to the long-term development of the community energy sector. However, we propose holding off in advancing it for at least a year, until the sector is more mature, with more operating projects and proven models.
4. Foster innovative approaches to electricity retailing.	The NSW Government has provided funding to a group on the North Coast of NSW to develop a community retailing business plan and at least two other retailers (one in development, one operational) are interested in supporting community energy.	Develop community energy retailing offers with at least one, if not all three of the retailers/prospective retail organisations interested in community energy. Work with the AER and Victorian Essential Services Commission to ensure the necessary retail licence exemptions are available to small community solar projects.
5. Develop shared services.	REPower Shoalhaven is currently investigating developing an administrative support service for community energy groups (at cost) to increase the ease of replication of the small-scale behind the meter community solar model they have pioneered.	Support REPower Shoalhaven to progress their support service. Investigate, what, if any shared services would be useful, affordable and help reduce costs or in-kind time for community groups. Simultaneously, gauge interest from community energy groups for a shared service approach.

Sub-strategy 2: Funding and Finance

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
6. Develop a funders roundtable to better connect funders and finances with community energy projects and strategic initiatives.	A preliminary funders roundtable met at the Community Energy Congress, however it has not progressed further.	Work with individual funders (government, philanthropic, industry) to build their interest in and support for community energy. Once there is a critical mass, co-host with a funder a founding community energy funders roundtable.

Sub-strategy 3: Capacity Building

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
1. Develop dynamic peer-to-peer networks and shared learning through collaborative communications tools.	Establishment of a C4CE private Facebook group is underway to rapidly share information. A C4CE Basecamp account to facilitate information sharing and project management of priority initiative working groups and projects is operating.	Evaluate the success of the Facebook group and Basecamp platform in facilitating shared learning and identify an alternative, easy to use platform, should the combination of Facebook and Basecamp be insufficient.
2. Develop a community energy training, mentoring and networking events program.	Recently C4CE brought a number of the Melbourne community energy groups and separately a number of the NSW groups together to share information. Also mentoring and training occurs on an ad hoc basis whether there is interest from a community energy group and funding for the mentoring or training. However, a dedicated program has not been developed.	Work with training organisations such as the Centre for Sustainability Leadership or TAFE to develop a targeted training program for community energy proponents in key areas of competency – both “soft” and “hard” skills. Draw on the significant body of research being undertaken by a number of PhD students in the area of community energy to inform this training program.
3. Develop an authoritative central web repository of information and resources.	C4CE has agreed that the Embark Wiki will be the central repository of information and resources. It is currently in the process of being updated with new case studies, project collateral, etc.	Develop a usability strategy and protocol for the Embark Wiki, so that it is not reliant on one person to update it.
4. Develop a database for stakeholders to register the support they can provide/require e.g. potential solar hosts register.	This has not been initiated.	Bring together a small group of stakeholders to identify the functional scope and possible structure of such a web database. There is a possibility this could also be incorporated into the Embark Wiki.
5. Coordination and backbone support.	C4CE has been established and a coordination and backbone support organisation (Community Power Agency) appointed. At the time of writing C4CE has 50 member organisations. As yet, however, C4CE and its backbone support is unfunded and therefore limited in its scope.	Secure funding for the coordination and backbone support function of C4CE, supporting the wider community energy sector.

Sub-strategy 4: Profile Raising and Stakeholder Support

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
1. Develop a partnership strategy for targeted allies of the community energy sector.	A large number of community energy allies have been engaged with through the National Strategy and Congress, however a dedicated partnership strategy has not been developed. The increasing number and diversity of members of C4CE is also contributing to this.	C4CE to develop a partnership strategy with input from a communications expert.
2. Create an evidence based communications strategy framework for community energy.	This has not been initiated.	Secure funding to employ a communications expert to work with C4CE member groups to develop a comprehensive framework for communicating community energy. Develop easy to use materials including a “key messages” document, a photo library, etc. Ensure that findings from academic research on community energy that is currently underway is incorporated into this framework.
3. Recruit influential champions to promote community energy.	This has not been initiated. There are some existing high-profile champions of community energy, such as Simon Holmes a Court and Minister Rob Stokes, although they are not explicitly associated with C4CE.	Once the communications strategy has been developed, recruit and pilot a champion strategy with one relevant person of influence. Identify, which areas of influence are most useful for the community energy sector currently.
4. Create a strategy for pitching community energy to key ‘gatekeepers’.	This has not been initiated.	Undertake a small piece of research to identify which messages resonate most with key ‘gatekeeper’ organisations, for example potential hosts/landowners (e.g. farmers), energy retailers and finance and funding networks.
5. Engage farming communities to co-create regional development opportunities.	This working group was founded at the Community Energy Congress, however it has not yet progressed further.	Organise a meeting with those people who volunteered to progress this initiative at the Congress, and identify the next steps. Build partnerships with other organisations championing this, such as SEREE and the Australian Wind Alliance.

Sub-strategy 4: Profile Raising and Stakeholder Support

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
6. Build partnerships with mainstream energy companies – networks and retailers.	<p>A few community energy groups – Surf Coast and Moreland Energy Foundation have undertaken customer switch partnerships with PowerShop, which has been used to help fund the development of community energy projects.</p> <p>The Institute for Sustainable Futures, Alternative Technology Association, Total Environment Centre and other community energy support organisations have been working with networks and to a lesser extent retailers to increase their capacity to engage with the broader decentralised energy sector for many years. Specifically, the ARENA funded Network Constraint Mapping Project led by ISF will be useful for community energy groups.</p>	<p>Use the Network Constraint Maps to identify if there are any areas of network constraint that coincide with the location of a community energy group. Use this process as the basis to support the initiation of a joint community energy project between a community and a network company.</p> <p>Build on the work of MEFL and Surf Coast to develop a partnership retailer model, based either on up-front funding or an improved PPA for community energy, based on customer loyalty and numbers.</p>
7. Create a council and community energy network.	This has been established through the Community Energy Congress and is operating, although it is currently small.	Organise a meeting with those people who volunteered to progress this initiative at the Congress, and identify the next steps. Develop resources to attract greater interest in community energy from councils.
8. Build support for community energy within all political parties.	Federally, the Labor, the Coalition and Greens Parties have spoken publicly about their support for community energy. In NSW, Labor, the Coalition and Greens all have community energy policies.	Continue to support community energy groups to educate politicians about the benefits of renewable energy policy for community energy projects and their community.

Sub-strategy 5: Policy and Regulatory Reform

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
1. Work to ensure there is strong and stable renewable energy policy.	Community energy groups continue to be engaged in renewable energy policy. For example over 1400 Hepburn Wind members and community energy stakeholders put in submissions to the RET review in 2014.	Continue to support community energy groups to educate politicians about the benefits of renewable energy policy for community energy projects and their community.
2. Support projects in gaining access to electricity networks at a reasonable cost and timeframe.	Recent changes to the National Electricity Rules (NER) improve the timeliness, information provision and fairness of grid connection processes for generators. Issues continue with respect to inverter standards, arrangements for energy storage, and national consistency.	Support the Victorian government in their consideration to replace or harmonise the outdated and inefficient Victorian grid connection processes with the NER. Undertake a small piece of research on how the recent changes are being implemented by network businesses.
3. Advocate regulatory changes necessary to facilitate community off-grid or micro-grid systems.	ATA is leading engagement and research on consumer protections and related regulations, focussing on gaps in the National Energy Customer Framework.	ATA to lead a community energy submissions to, and otherwise engage with, COAG Energy Council and Australian Energy Regulator's related policy development processes. Engage with other stakeholders, including energy businesses, to resolve show-stopper issues that prevent communities owning and operating energy networks.
4. Promote rights for projects to sell energy at a fair price.	Community energy projects are still rarely offered a fair and reasonable price for energy they export to the grid. The decline in access to a fair price in recent years has followed the trends of price deregulation, the removal of mandatory feed in tariffs, the instability of the Renewable Energy Target and low energy wholesale prices due to an oversupply of generation capacity. The ACT reverse auction feed-in-tariff included a component for community solar.	Continue engagement with energy networks and others with respect to valuing generators and peak load management for network support (see also 8. Virtual Net Metering and Local Network Charges below). Continue to advance the creation of a community focused small generator aggregator and/or a community retailer (see Funding and Finance Sub-Strategy). Engage with state-based energy tariff review processes. Advocate for reverse auction feed-in-tariff policies in other states. Work to ensure mandatory minimum feed in tariffs in jurisdictions that don't have these.

Sub-strategy 5: Policy and Regulatory Reform

Strategic Initiatives	Status	Next Actions
5. Advocate for rules that would make it easier and less costly to secure community investors.	Submissions made to CAMAC inquiry on crowd sourcing equity. However, a strategic initiative to help enable crowd-based equity funding has not been initiated.	Host a roundtable with a key community energy support organisations, groups, finance organisations and corporate lawyers to identify the best possible ways to address these issues e.g. what exemptions to work for and/or what workarounds might be possible. Engage with the Department of Industry's current crowd-sourced equity funding reform process.
6. Work with State Governments to develop programs to support community energy.	The NSW, ACT and Victorian governments have announced funding and support for community energy.	Continue to build relationships with and the profile of community energy with state governments, particularly Queensland and South Australia who have good renewable energy policy, but no community energy programs.
7. Help establish dedicated community energy support policies.	C4CE has developed a briefing paper on community energy reverse auctions and have sent it to a number of relevant policy makers.	Continue to work with and support community energy groups to work with policy makers in local, state, federal governments to develop their understanding of and support for dedicated community energy policy.
8. Enable Virtual Net Metering. And Local Network Charging	Research project targeting virtual trials of Local Network Charges and Virtual Net Metering in development stage with numerous local government, network business, retailer, utility, distributed generation and research partners.	Finalise research partnership and contract arrangements in second quarter 2015, for project scheduled to deliver research supporting a rule change proposal within 12-18 months.
9. Advocate for supportive planning assessment frameworks for community energy projects.	Advocacy undertaken by C4CE members and partners has progressed an amendment to Victorian Wind Planning Guidelines to make them more accessible to community wind energy projects.	Continue to engage with state governments around supportive planning and policy arrangements for community energy.