



## Community Energy Congress Report





# INTRODUCTION

The inaugural Community Energy Congress was held at the National Library of Australia in Canberra on June 16-17, 2014. The Congress was the first time people from across Australia had come together at such a scale to discuss how to grow a vibrant community energy sector in Australia.

## THE AIMS OF THE CONGRESS WERE TO:

- Develop pathways for communities, companies, and local government to catalyse change;
- Identify key opportunities and barriers facing the sector;
- Facilitate sharing of information and strategies about overcoming the barriers and realising opportunities;
- Develop skills and build capacity for communities wanting to develop and deliver a community energy project;
- Contribute to the development of the National Community Energy Strategy;
- Consolidate and coordinate efforts across the nation in this emerging sector; and
- Foster new networks and relationships.

The organising team is proud to call the inaugural Community Energy Congress an overwhelming success, with 80% of participants rating the Congress as excellent, and 93% saying the Congress exceeded or met their expectations. This report provides a summary of who attended the Congress, what they experienced, together with key highlights and achievements.

*“Never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”*  
Margaret Meade



Nicky Ison, Ed Langham, Taryn Lane, Jarra Hicks, Mark Byrne, Paul Cruickshank, Franziska Mey, Craig Memery, Adam Blakester and the rest of the Community Energy Congress organising team, partners and sponsors!

*“Keep up the wonderful work. You have enabled so many like-minded people to come together to reinforce their beliefs in community owned power systems. Don’t STOP.”*



# Congress Attendance

The Community Energy Congress sold out, with at least 341 attendees across the two days in a venue that held 300 people. Participants came from every state and territory in Australia (Figure 1). Approximately half of the participants came from New South Wales, which is unsurprising due to both proximity to the venue and the support provided by the NSW Government, who funded the registration fee for members of NSW community energy groups. In addition there were approximately 10 international delegates from Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the US.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Australian attendees, by state**

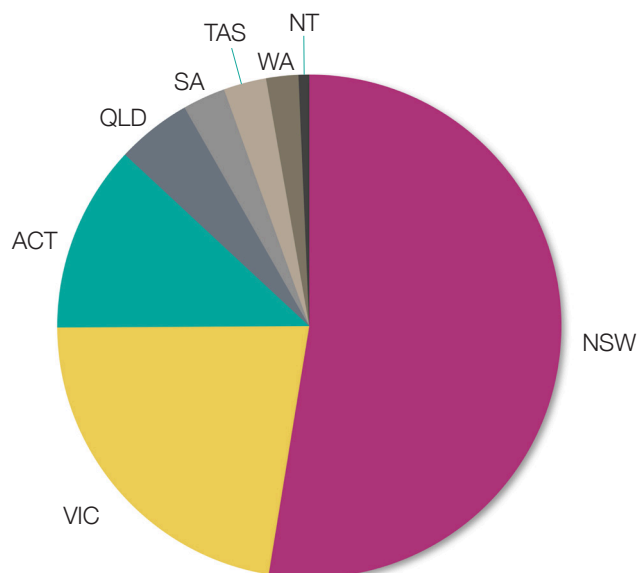
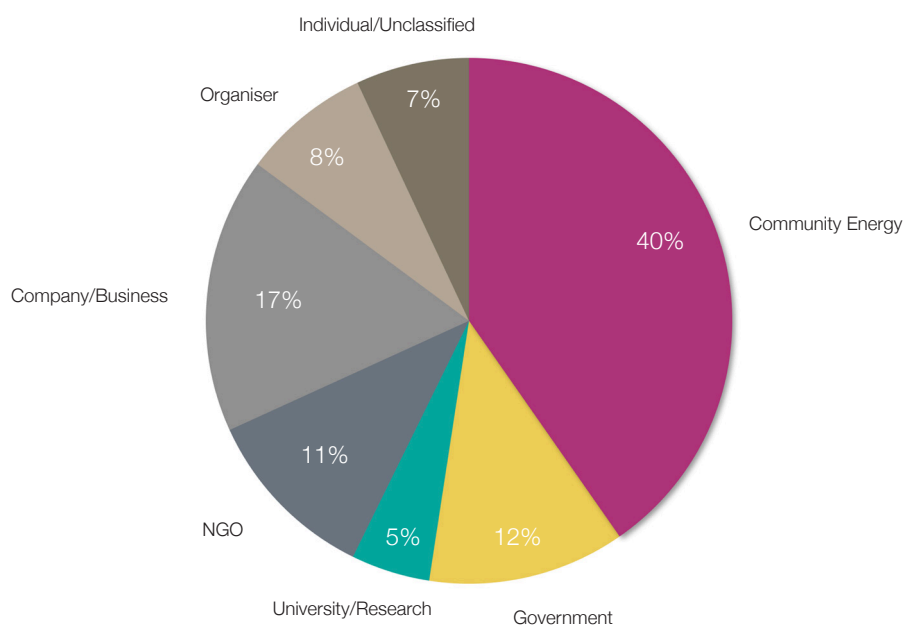


Figure 2 outlines the participant breakdown by organisational category. Unsurprisingly, community energy groups make up the largest proportion of attendees (40%), followed by Government (state, federal and local) and business attendees.

**Figure 2: Distribution of attendees by organisational category**



Participants mainly heard about the Congress through word of mouth (38%). Other important channels included email advertising (17%), the Coalition for Community Energy (C4CE) website (5%), and other channels such as media and other websites (14%).

# Congress Program

The Community Energy Congress set out to deliver an engaging, inspiring and useful program. To that end the program was designed to strike a balance between inspiring key-note addresses and interactive workshop breakout sessions. Highlights of the program included:

- Congress Welcome session facilitated by Geoff Brown and Mark Spain using SMS-based “Poll Everywhere” technology to give the participants an interactive sense of who was in the room.
- Key note addresses from Arno Zengle, Mayor of Wildpoldsried in Germany, Ivor Frischnecht, CEO of ARENA, and Simon Holmes a Court of Hepburn Wind and Embark.
- The formal launch of the Coalition for Community Energy.
- Social networking drinks hosted by the South East Region of Renewable Energy Excellence (SERREE).
- [A video message from NSW Environment Minister Rob Stokes.](#)
- A Community Energy Policy Futures session with Gary Gray (Federal Labor), Christine Milne (Australian Greens) and Simon Corbell (ACT Labor).
- ‘Shaping a National Community Energy Strategy’ session at Old Parliament House.
- Training sessions on Negotiating Host Sites, the Cooperative Toolbox, Community Engagement and Community Building, Crowdfunding, Community Solar Feasibility Assessment and Connecting Projects to the Grid, held on the day before and day after the Congress.

Table 1 and Table 2 outline the full program, including the 14 breakout sessions.

**Table 1: Program Overview**

Day 1 - Monday	Day 2 - Tuesday
Welcome to the Congress and Keynote Addresses	Shaping a National Community Energy Strategy (At old Parliament House)
Introducing the Australian Community Energy Sector	Breakout Session 3
Community Energy Policy Futures	Breakout Session 4
Launch of the Coalition for Community Energy	Wrap-up and close Conference
Breakout Session 1	
Breakout Session 2	
Congress Social Event	

**Table 2: Congress Breakout Sessions**

Breakout Sessions	
Breakout Session 1	Breakout Session 2
Introduction to community energy and stories	Models of successful community energy
Introduction to the energy market	Councils and community energy
Getting bioenergy and hydro projects up and running	Not just talking about my generation: other opportunities
Breakout Session 3	Breakout Session 4
Community engagement and community building	The policy context: government policies and initiatives
Energy networks: living with ‘em, living without ‘em	Community energy as a regional development strategy
Show me the money: Funding and financing community energy projects	Options for selling energy
Getting community solar projects up and running	Getting wind projects up and running

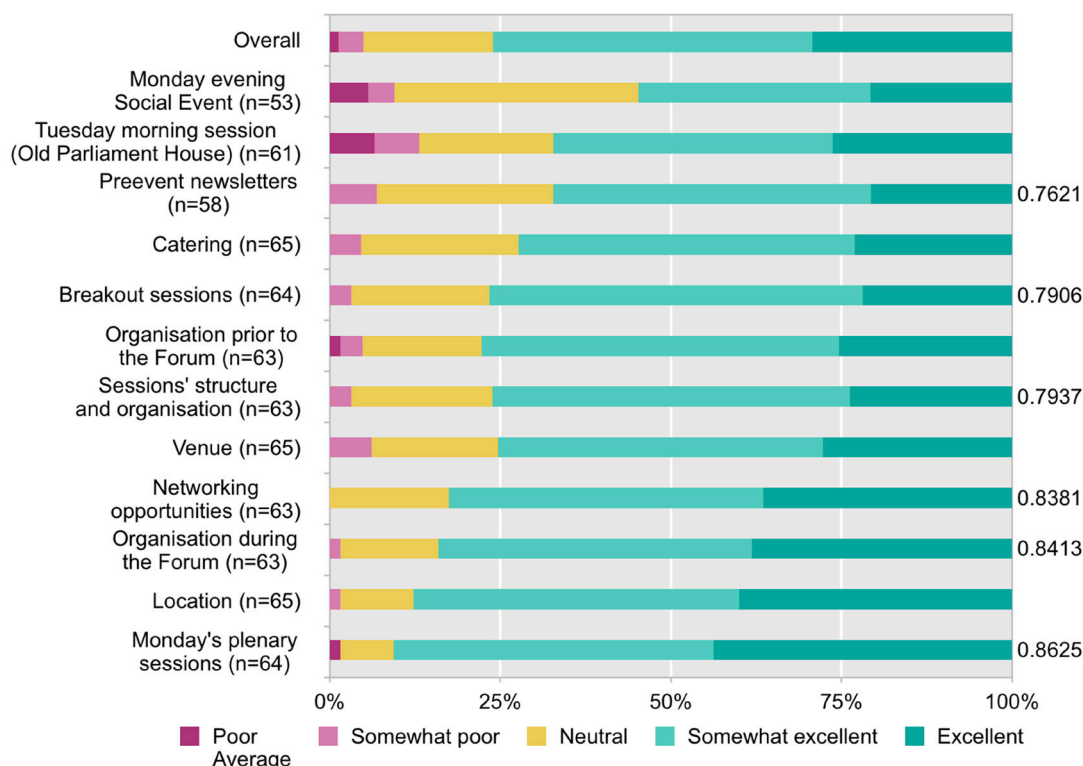
The full program can be found at <http://c4ce.net.au/congress/program/> and photos, notes and presentations from the Congress can be found at <https://c4cecongress14.wordpress.com/>.

# Participant Feedback

Sixty-five participants filled in the online evaluation form after the Congress. When asked to rate aspects of the Congress on a five-point scale from Excellent to Poor, the response was overwhelmingly positive (Figure 3) with all aspects receiving a greater than 55% excellent or good rating. In particular, participants noted that Arno Zengerle, Mayor of Wildpoldsried was a standout speaker and 35% of participants noted that they didn't have a "least favourite session".

*"ALL sessions had something positive to offer."*

**Figure 3: Participant Evaluation – Rating Elements of the Congress**



Participants were asked if they were better equipped to progress their community energy project after attending the Congress. The vast majority (80%) stated that now they have either a better knowledge (48%) and/or more contacts (27%) to help progress their project. One participant noted:

*"Absolutely [I am better equipped to progress my community energy project] - confidence, new partners and even presentation files. THANK YOU!!"*

Participants were asked what they found to be the most surprising part about the Congress, to which 56% stated that they didn't expect such a large a number of people to be involved in community energy. Twenty-one per cent said the enthusiasm at the event and 13% the knowledge available or received at the Congress surprised them most.

Areas identified for improvement for future events include: having a venue with better acoustics (i.e. less noisy) and more space (venues were "squeazy" with the larger-than-anticipated number of attendees) and more notice of the Congress side events, particularly the training program. Many participants also commented on a lack of time for some sessions.

*"The facilitators did an amazing job but for the size of the room, and the number of people maybe it was a little too ambitious. Although lots of great stuff was no doubt achieved."*

A number of participants also found the Shaping a National Community Energy Strategy session at Old Parliament House "confusing" or "overly ambitious".

# Congress Media

The Community Energy Congress received the following media coverage:



- New solar energy scheme to be driven by community, ABC1 7pm News Canberra, Mon 16 June, >> <http://ab.co/1i3bhfa>



- Live studio interview w/ Nicky Ison, 666 ABC Canberra Sunday Brunch program, 10.15am Sun 15 June
- Radio newsgrabs - 2SM and Mix 106 ACT, 16 Jun



- The Liberal Party should be community energy's number one fan (op-ed), Canberra Times, Wed 18 June, >> <http://bit.ly/1nizZpu>
- ACT invites mum and dad investors to back grass-roots solar, Canberra Times, Tue 17 June, >> <http://bit.ly/1qmxqYp>



- Community energy in focus at Australian-first congress in Canberra, ABC News Online, Mon 16 June, >> <http://ab.co/1iCAfgn> \*Syndicated to Prime 7 and Yahoo!7 News
- Community invited to submit proposals for ACT's new solar energy scheme, ABC News Online, Mon 16 June, >> <http://ab.co/1shxquF>
- Australia's power struggle: Old politics vs new energy, RenewEconomy, Tue 17 June, >> <http://bit.ly/1iicHLZ>
- ACT kicks off 1MW community solar program, RenewEconomy, Mon 16 June, >> <http://bit.ly/U8hvj2>
- Farmers, activists warn against reducing renewable energy target on Global Wind Energy, Day, [SMH.com.au](http://SMH.com.au), Sun 15 June, >> <http://bit.ly/1i0EcAH>

*"Overall it was fabulous and even I was impressed in spite of my usual cynical self!"*



## Organising the Community Energy Congress

The Community Energy Congress was organised by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology Sydney, the Alternative Technology Association, Community Power Agency, Embark, Starfish Initiatives, Sustainable Regional Australia and the Total Environment Centre. The main Congress logistics were undertaken by Catalyst Events and ISF.

## Funding the Community Energy Congress

The Community Energy Congress, with the aid of significant in-kind time contributions from the organising organisations, was a cost-neutral event. In total \$196,400 was raised to put on the Congress (see breakdown in Table 3). Particular thanks go to our sponsors ARENA, the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Infigen, Zhenfa, Bendigo Bank, the ACT Department of Environment and Sustainable Development, City of Sydney, FRV and the GreenPower Program.

**Table 3: Congress Income**

Income Stream	Amount (Ex GST)
Registrations	\$72,400
Sponsorship*	\$50,000
Organising Grants**	\$73,500
Other	\$500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$196,400</b>

\* This does not include the value of the sponsorship from GreenPower who purchased GreenPower from community energy projects to make the Congress a Carbon Neutral event, or sponsorship from the Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals (BCCM) who paid for the Cooperative Toolkit training.

\*\* This includes the proportion of the ARENA grant to develop the National Community Energy Strategy that contributed to the Congress organisation, as well as funding secured from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to deliver the side training program.

## The Next Community Energy Congress

Having received so much positive feedback with many participants and other community energy stakeholders asking when the next Community Energy Congress will be held, the Coalition for Community Energy has decided that the event should be held every two years, with the next Community Energy Congress proposed for 2016. If your organisation would like to be involved in or receive notices about the next Community Energy Congress, please contact [Secretariat@c4ce.net.au](mailto:Secretariat@c4ce.net.au).

*“Overall - it was a great conference and a fantastic effort by all those involved - thank you.”*



Thank you to every one ~ participants, sponsors,  
organisers, partners and supporters ~ who  
contributed to making the National Community  
Energy Congress a memorable moment in the  
creation of a thriving community energy sector and  
movement in Australia and beyond.

