



Item: 5.1 **Ref:** WO/2022/03126
Title: Mayoral Minute – Renewable Energy Developments
Author: Mayor Eric Noakes
Previous Items: Not Applicable
Attachment: No

Community Strategic Plan Reference:

Goal 6.4: *Walcha will increase the use and production of renewable energy.*
Strategy 6.4.1: *Establish alternative renewable energy supplies that will meet our energy needs.*

RECOMMENDATION: That Walcha Council take a neutral position in relation to the Winterbourne Wind Project noting:

1. Walcha Council continues its dialogue with Winterbourne Wind in relation to possible infrastructure agreements and community fund; and
 2. Walcha Council lobbies strongly State & Federal Governments to ensure should project approval be achieved Walcha and its community benefit as much as possible from State Government approval.
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Report:

It is abundantly clear that renewable energy development in Walcha is a divisive topic, pitting friends and families against each other; destroying long term relationships and placing Council in an unenviable position. To support or not?

It is evidenced by the recently adopted Community Strategic Plan (CSP) that Council supports renewable energy. Goal 6.4 *Walcha will increase the use and production of renewable energy* with Strategy 6.4.1 *Establish alternative renewable energy supplies that will meet our energy needs.*

It is also evident from the 2022 Integrated System Plan – June 2022 released by the Australian Energy Market Operation (AEMO) page 7, that “... *there is an over-riding message from both, it is that our energy system transformation is accelerating and irreversible, and ever more comprehensive and challenging.*”

That renewable energy will play a role in our future energy needs is undeniable, yet the role by Council to support or oppose wind generating projects in Walcha is not a decision for Council. Council has no decision making powers in what are projects of state significance.

While not taking a position either way, this Council has not sat on its hands.



This Council has already commenced a dialogue with Energy Developers to ensure the elements Council has some level of control over, such as infrastructure and distribution of 'community funds' are undertaken and delivered in the best interest to the Walcha Community. Indeed, the previous Council provided its support in principal, at the time, for the Walcha Energy Project.

Further evidence of a proactive Council is CoREM – the *Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors*. Walcha Council created this forum in June this year where we seek to share and learn from other local governments in their journey with renewable energy for the benefit of our respective communities. It is also a forum potentially covering five (5) states and some 70 local governments that seeks to influence Commonwealth and State legislations thereby providing certain standards with regard to infrastructure agreements and community funds.

As your Mayor I am approached often by those seeking to influence me and Council to either publicly support or not support wind farms here in Walcha. My strong view is that this is not a position for Council. How does one gauge support for either position? A petition? A website with a bunch of 'likes'? And regardless, is that indicative of what all our community wants?

In my view there is nothing to be gained by taking a position other than that of neutrality and continue to work alongside potential proponents, other Councils and other levels of government – just as we are doing right now.

My fellow Councillors I call on your support for this resolution as this is a battle where there will be no winners and one where Council has an obligation to the whole community – not just one group.