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Regions embrace renewable energy



Wind power.

Photo: Warren Hackshall

Nick Sheridan
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THE growing concern about the security of sustainable energy supplies has prompted a number of regional communities in Victoria to begin the move towards renewable energy sources.

That will be the focus of the *Renewable Energy and Regional Australia* conference being held today and tomorrow in Bendigo.

Many regional communities are now ready to act on the rising awareness of the need to pursue cleaner energy sources, according to Bendigo councillor Keith Reynard, one of the conference organisers.

"I think, in many respects, communities are going to lead in this," Mr Reynard said.

Initiatives such as one being developed by the Hepburn Renewable Energy Association — where a community group is setting up two community-owned wind turbines in the Daylesford area capable of producing two megawatts of electricity to be sold into the grid — are living examples of this new approach in action.

David Shapero, managing director of Future Energy, a Victorian renewable energy company that is facilitating the Hepburn energy project, said he believed there was massive potential for projects such as this to develop in the future.

"I suspect that this is an industry that will be a growth industry for probably the next 50-plus years," he said.

Future Energy's community projects are based on a model developed in Denmark in the 1980s.

Twenty per cent of Denmark's energy is now produced by wind power and half of that generating capacity is community owned.

"Our model allows individuals to directly own some renewable energy generation and share in the financial rewards, environmental rewards and social rewards," Mr Shapero said.

Projects such as these are attracting the interest of venture capitalists such as Aaron Fyke, of Starfish Ventures, an Australian company investing in "clean technologies".

"Venture capitalists look for businesses that are addressing markets that are: A) really large, and: B) growing quickly. And what's really attractive with clean tech is that both of those are true," said Mr Fyke, who will be speaking at the conference tomorrow.

The distance from the main source of energy distribution is something that already concerns people in the Bendigo area, according to Cr Reynard.

"In Bendigo and central Victoria, 15 per cent of the electricity that's generated is lost in transmission, so if we can generate electricity locally then we can save 15 per cent on our energy bills," he said.

<http://www.renewableenergy>

<http://conference.com.au>

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