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Inquiry Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
Department of the House of Representatives

To: House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy

From: Renewable Albury Wodonga Energy (RAW)

Re: House Environment and Energy Committee - Follow up from Inquiry into Australian Local Power Agency Bills - request for responses to questions in writing

By email

Dear ██████████,

Thank you for the follow up questions in relation to the Inquiry into Australian Local Power Agency Bills.

The following responses have been made in consultation with members. Questions from the Committee are in *italics*.

1. How many projects has your organisation supported to date?

RAW Energy has undertaken numerous community events, seminars, and community education in a volunteer capacity. This includes involvement in major forums such as Thurgoona Community Forums, which explored options for community energy, and solar energy in the area. Other events include participation in the annual Albury Wodonga Sustainable Living Festival to promote energy efficiency, renewable energy for residents and businesses and RAW Energy projects.

2. How many projects have been completed?

Three major projects have been undertaken. Of these, two were completed with one undergoing ongoing monitoring while one was unable to be completed. These three projects with external funding were (in date order):

1. Feasibility study and develop a plan for a solar farm within Wodonga that would benefit the community

2. Implement the business case to complete the Wodonga Community Solar Project (WSCP)
3. Addressing energy poverty through renewable energy.

1. Feasibility study and develop a plan for a solar farm within Wodonga that would benefit the community

In June 2016, Wodonga Council, in conjunction with Renewable Albury Wodonga Energy, received a New Energy Jobs Fund Grant from DELWP (Victorian Department of Energy, Land, Water and Planning). \$80,000 was granted to conduct a feasibility study and develop a plan for a solar farm within Wodonga that could benefit the community.

Wodonga Council also added \$20,000 towards the study. Moreland Energy Foundation Limited (MEFL) were contracted to prepare a feasibility study and a business case. The aim of the funding was to identify a way that low income houses in Wodonga could directly benefit from a large scale solar installation.

This project was in two phases: Phase 1 was a Feasibility study completed in June 2017. The report is available [here](#).

Phase 2 – Business case Phase 2 concentrated on building a business case and was completed by MEFL in January 2018 and presented to stakeholders in December 2017. The full business case is available [here](#).

2. Implement the business case to complete the Wodonga Community Solar Project (WSCP)

RAW Energy Inc and Wodonga Council were awarded a second grant from DELWP in April 2018 to complete the Wodonga Community Solar Project (WSCP). The Climate Change Innovation Grant was awarded to implement the business case based upon two years of planning. RAW Energy Inc engaged a part time Project Officer to advance the WSCP.

The initial stage for the project was to call for Requests for Quotation (RFQ) for a Project Manager, who was then appointed. Stakeholders, involved in the previous NEJF project, were consulted and their interest in working together on this new funding project was sought.

The two objectives of the project were:

1. To assist low-income households through an Energy Benefits Program. More information is outlined below. (Project 3)
2. To allow community investment in a solar farm of a minimum of 2 MW in size.

3. Addressing Energy Poverty through renewable energy.

Launched on October 14th 2019. Further information is available on the [website](#)

RAW Energy Inc worked with BeyondHousing to install ten solar power systems on social housing homes in Wodonga. Each of the ten solar power systems included a Mondo Ubi energy management system, which gives households real time visibility of their energy generation and consumption. The solar power systems reduce overall electricity costs, and the Ubi display provides households visibility and control over their energy costs. There is an ongoing monitoring element of this project.

- 2. How are those existing projects funded? Is there any state, federal or local government funding involved? Could you please provide a breakdown of those funding sources from government?*

2.1 Feasibility study and develop a plan for a solar farm within Wodonga that would benefit the community

State Government: New Energy Jobs Fund Grant from DELWP (Victorian Department of Energy, Land, Water and Planning). \$80,000

Wodonga City Council: \$20,000

2.2 Implement the business case to complete the Wodonga Community Solar Project (WSCP)

This second project was funded by the Victorian State Government Climate Change Innovation Grant CCIG 2018-2019.

The amount of funding for the whole project was \$199,999. While there was considerable progress with this project and extensive effort put into the development and issuing of tender requests, it was found that the initial project brief was unable to be completed because of instrument of funding that had been incorporated into the project, namely the use of a prospectus, was inappropriate. A full report of the process used,

including the analysis by RAW Energy as to whether the project should proceed to completion was provided in the initial submission from RAW Energy to the Committee.

As outlined on the RAW Energy website:

“Another part of the project was to create a prospectus that would allow community investment and ownership of any installations. Any profits derived from the projects over time would be fed into the Energy Benefits program and to investors. In partnership with Wodonga Council, a tender was developed and put to market. When the submissions were evaluated, it became clear that the tender document had not been specific enough about the skills required. It was decided to withdraw the tender and redraft another one to more accurately reflect the actual preparation and production of a prospectus.

At the conclusion of the two tender processes, RAW Energy needed to consider whether it was viable to continue with the project by pursuing the development of a prospectus. A special meeting of the Board was held and it was agreed that the remaining funds should be returned to the State. Formal notification of this decision was provided to the City of Wodonga, and through them to DELWP.”

2.3 Addressing Energy Poverty.

Victorian State Government Funding through Renewable Communities Program: \$54,000.

3. What is your ownership structure and number of shareholders/members?

RAW Energy is a volunteer organisation. For most of its existence it has been an informal community group with no legal structure. Grant applications were auspiced by another organisation who had legal status. RAW Energy works closely with local government and for at least two of the projects where funding was sought, the City of Wodonga applied in partnership with RAW Energy. This also ensured that the City of Wodonga used its very clear procurement and project management rules which helped to ensure probity.

In 2016/17 RAW Energy decided to become an incorporated body in order to be able to apply for funding which required an incorporated organisation. Considerable time was spent in establishing the constitution and legal process and also in ensuring meetings and approaches were undertaken in accordance with good governance. For a small organisation

and membership, over time this became onerous and leached the joy out of the committee members. There was also less personal energy available to initiate and develop new programs. As such, at the Annual meeting of 2021 it was resolved that RAW Energy become unincorporated. This process is now underway.

RAW Energy anticipates it will focus on more networking and community linkages as it identifies its next phase of initiatives and programs

4. What are the total dividends and returns paid to shareholders or members during the course of your organisation's operation?

There are no dividends or returns paid to members of the group. It is entirely voluntary.

5. What is your total number of ongoing full time employees?

There are no full time employees.

6. What is the total amount of salary paid to your employees or board members annually?

There is no salary paid to board members.

During one of the projects funding had been identified for a project officer. This was a part time position that had an employee/contractor for a period of approximately 4 months.

Thank you for the opportunity of providing further information to the Committee. I would emphasise that there has been enormous effort through volunteer action in our group and others across Australia. The legislation that is being reviewed by the Committee provides an opportunity to significantly leverage that work and provide major benefits particularly to rural and regional Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Narelle Martin

On behalf of RAW Energy.