

Communities can make pay while the sun shines



GENERATE FUNDS: Geelong Sustainability Group president Dan Cowdell and Mik Aitd say there is much support for renewable energy in Geelong.

Picture: MIKE DUGDALE

Burning question over deal

AFTER months of political stalemate, the Federal Government and Labor have reached a deal on the renewable energy target.

But the Opposition won't support a last-minute inclusion of wood waste fuel as a renewable source.

The parties agreed in principle to cut the legislated target from 41,000GWh to 33,000, ending months of industry uncertainty that has stalled clean energy investment and cost jobs.

The Government wants to slash the RET, which requires 20 per cent of Australia's energy to come from renewables by 2020, amid concerns it will overreach that goal due to falling energy demand.

Cabinet on Thursday approved the increase from 32,000GWh, after two Coalition MPs broke ranks calling for an end to the political impasse and peak business groups backed a concession.

Labor had been backing the clean energy industry's compromise of 33,500.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt and Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane included biomass fuel — derived from burning wood waste — in the offer presented to Labor at a meeting in Melbourne yesterday.

Opposition environment spokesman Mark Butler labelled that a last-minute "red-herring" that Labor would not accept.

It's expected Labor will try to amend the legislation when it comes before Parliament.

But Mr Macfarlane believes he doesn't need the Opposition to win approval to include biomass fuel, convinced he has enough support from crossbench senators like Ricky Muir.

Both the Coalition and Labor still have to take the "in principle" deal back to their party rooms for approval early next week.

COURTNEY CRANE

SOLAR energy would power economic gains for the community under a project being touted by Geelong Sustainability Group.

The green group hopes to create Geelong's first Community Owned Renewable Energy (CORE) project similar to others successfully rolled out in small communities across the country.

The group's president Dan Cowdell said the idea was the result of a community survey, in which people had over-

whelmingly voiced their support for the cause.

He said the initiative would generate funds for investors and community projects while producing a cheap energy source for purchasers.

"There are plenty of communities that have already gone down this road so the good news is we don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are a number of proven community energy models that we will be analysing and looking to replicate here in Geelong," he said.

"One model is to find a business in Geelong that uses a lot of power during the day, and

put solar panels on the roof by asking people to invest in the project.

"The community entity of investors would enter into a power purchase agreement with the business whereby they purchase power at a cheap rate, and funds are generated providing a return for investors and also a financial

return to a community fund."

A CORE project rolled out in Shoalhaven, NSW, in 2013 raised \$120,000 from investors around Australia in 10 days. After using the roof of the local bowls club as its first project, the group is preparing to install solar panels on local churches and the local high school, helping save hundreds of thou-

'People want to take control of their own energy production.'

COMMUNITY OWNED RENEWABLE ENERGY
PRESIDENT DAN COWDELL

sands in power costs.

Long term, Mr Cowdell said wind power could also become a possible money-driving initiative for CORE investors.

The group held its first CORE community meeting last month and Mr Cowdell said there was a "powerful" shared feeling that "people want to take control of their own energy production".

He said the next step would be to gauge community interest and ideas.

To find out more about CORE and upcoming meetings, go to: geelongustainability.org.au/core