

Cobargo renewable energy microgrid conversation

Notes and take-aways

Saturday 16 September 2023 – Cobargo Showground

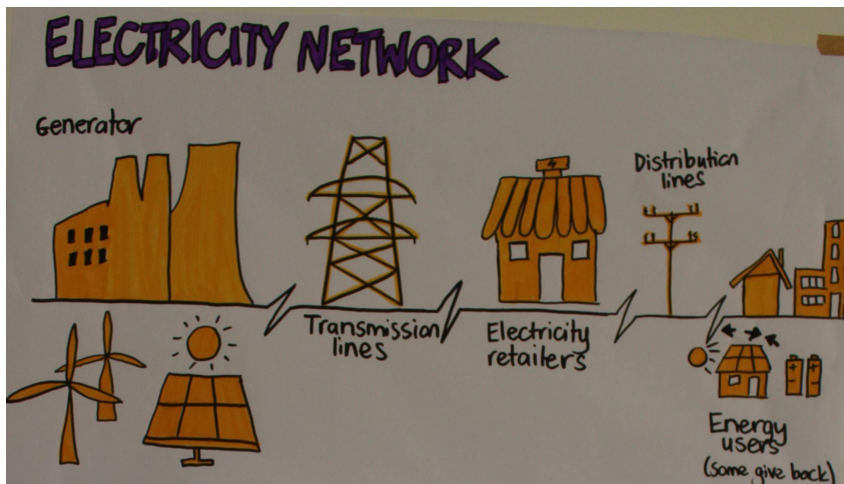
What's possible for the Cobargo area if we moved forward with building a renewable energy microgrid?

More than 50 people came together for a community catch up for the [Cobargo Renewable Energy Microgrid project](#) – representing a diverse range of residents and stakeholders. The Cobargo and District Energy Transition committee (CaDET) and ITP (tech partners) were present, along with some of Bega Valley's elected representatives. Hosts were Mel Geltch, Alexa Pegg (Campfire Coop) and Dave Newell.

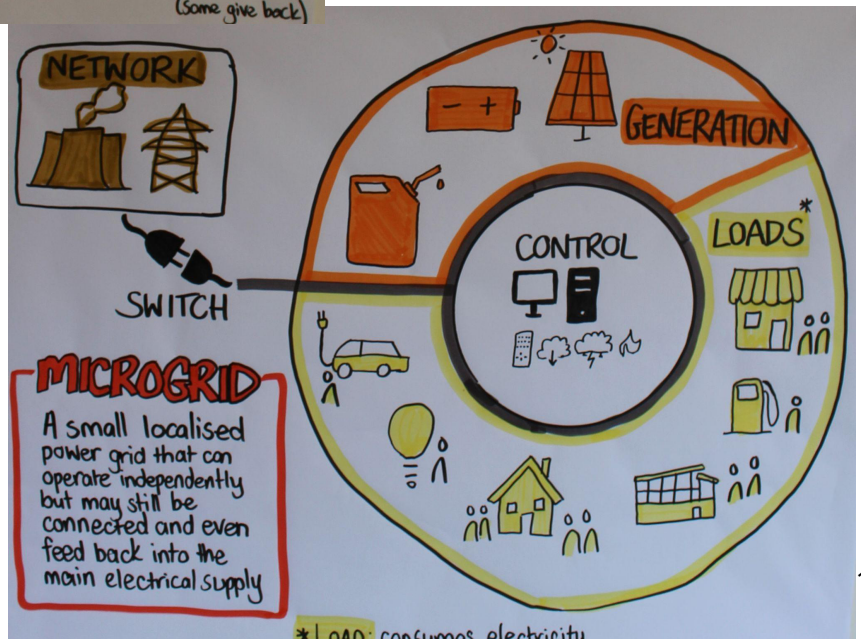
Respected local Aboriginal leader Rodney Kelly acknowledged Country on our behalf as we began, and we were welcomed by Debra Summer from the CaDET Committee.

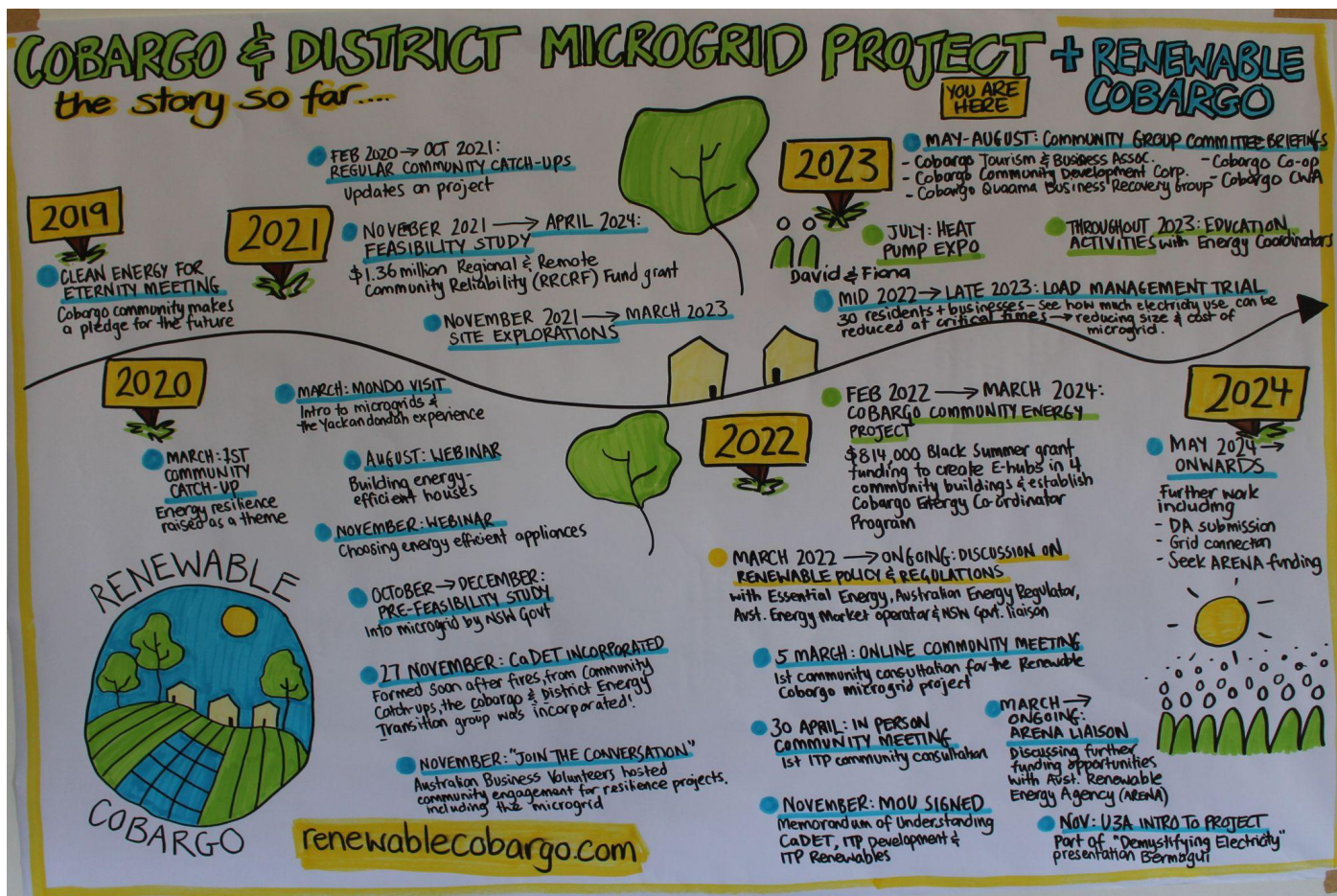
At tables we explored: **Of all of the places you could be today, why did you choose to be here?**

Zena Armstrong, CaDET chair, gave a brief update on where the project was at, saying that the purpose of the catch up was to give community members a voice on the project, and to see how we might move forward together.



There were some graphics on the wall showing a simple explanation of the electricity network and how a microgrid works with the network





A timeline of the activity and conversations so far regarding the project

Over two rounds of cafe conversations in small groups, we explored these questions:

1. How might our communities and households benefit from a renewable energy microgrid?
2. What is needed now for this community project to work really well?

Exploring benefits

These responses have been grouped, like with like.

- Power stays on – security
- Energy security
- Power security - health – reduced brown outs
- Energy security in emergency
- Energy resilience – not losing power when it is really needed
- Self-sufficiency in a remote location
- Self sustainability and community sustainability
- Independence when feed down
- More consistent energy flow
- Independent of the main grid at all times
- Community ownership
- Community owned asset
- Community investment
- Community investment
- Ethical choice of components for participants
- Keep \$\$ in Cobargo
- No benefits

- Agency and hope
- Community ownership - sense of autonomy and pride
- Pilot demo project easier for others including financial structures
- Positive identity for Cobargo – becomes renowned for its energy innovation
- Potential cheaper electricity costs
- Financial – reinvest – reduced bills
- Savings to our bills
- Skilled local jobs
- Helping the whole community (in crisis)
- Neighbours look after each other
- Brings community together – caring for each other
- Clean energy
- Help transition to renewables - cheaper in the future

What's needed now?

These responses have been grouped, like with like.

- Sharing info esp transparency - both positive and negative impacts
- Collaboration and seeking feedback
- Fully open process - Good communication flow - alleviating concerns
- Community confidence
- Maintenance plan
- Panel location
- How will this affect adjoining landholders?
- Asset location discussions to address concerns
- The extent and design of the network
- Visual representation and map
- Clarity re: social and \$ structure involved
- Clarity around information
- Community buy-in/shared vision - details - defined and communicated benefits
- Clarity re: what it will be, cost, ownership, who will benefit?, where?
- Support from all levels of government, regulators, electricity distribution
- Funding - in combination with community ownership/investment
- Money - who pays for it - who profits?
- Respect, courage, commitment
- Community cohesiveness - openness and respect for each other opinion
- Support for core project team - financial, energy, emotional
- Clarifying what shared ownership looks like
- Opportunity for community engagement - ownership
- Owned & run locally
- We want the energy to benefit the community
- Technically sound
- What are the aims of the microgrid? clarity
- ID the top shared goals
- More sustainable system not only for emergency

Open Space conversations

Amenity/Neighbour Impact

Host: Derek, Mel & Judith (they joined Derek, with their question:

Why haven't the adjoining landholders been consulted about placement of 15ha of solar panels?)

Key takeaways: We support the concept at a different location. Our amenity is not compensable.

Technical questions about microgrid

How will my existing solar/battery work with it? Host: Susan, Rob, Matt

Key takeaways: Everything operates as usual most of the time – including during an outage.

People want to know what will stay powered, when.

How do we design this considering selfishness and greed? Host: Chris

Takeaway: Relational complexity and priorities - The soft systems. Scarcity mindset. Personal mindfulness

What would you need to make this microgrid idea more acceptable? Host: Jo

Key takeaway: Move at a pace that allows people's concerns to be truly heard.

Are there models that we can examine the pros and cons? Host: Don

Key takeaway: yes there are!

How is investment raised and benefit distributed? Host: Mike N

Key takeaway: various models from small super investors and co-ops

How can a microgrid for emergencies contribute to wider community resilience? Host: Mike

Key takeaway: We need to develop a system that benefits all the community day-to-day



Questions & insights

There was space on the wall to capture other questions and insights:

- I support a microgrid but I'm sure it could be in another place – not surrounded by 7 houses
- Were very concerned about the impacts of the solar farm on our nearby property
- Access while it's being built?
- Health from dust during construction?
- View from our property?
- A fire hazard?
- Impact on property value
- Has the solar farm site been chosen? (Doug & Del)
- How secure will the microgrid infrastructure be from damage?
- During a catastrophic event? Eg. powerlines panels - will it continue to generate/distribute power?



Check out: What will you carry with you from today?

Zena Armstrong from the CaDET committee thanked everyone for their contributions. Zena said it had been a really valuable and important listening exercise, and that the Committee would take what had been shared and consider it thoughtfully moving forward.

Here's what everyone shared, in a few words, to close the conversation:

- Gratitude, respect, hope
- Engaged, included, my community
- Anything is an improvement
- Productive communication
- Hopeful engagement
- Do what we can and enjoy it
- Where is the communication?
- It's been good
- Hope, trust, future
- Grateful
- More info needed, more detail
- Keep going
- Uncertainty, concern, hope
- Really positive community
- Need details
- Good community conversations
- Community benefits for all
- Many sticky notes
- Hope curiosity gratitude
- Hope
- Feasibility study
- Heartened
- Information concern
- Inspiration
- Someone to listen to us
- Gratitude openness & possibility
- Copious communication growth
- Good community engagement
- On the right track
- Openness, compassion, gratitude
- Where is the community?
- To the future
- Potentially good outcomes
- Hope, communication, shared work
- Very interesting day
- Gratitude
- Interesting, details
- Community, conflict
- Curiosity
- Keep hearing our voices
- Important innovation, involved

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