



2021 AGM – Presidents Report

13 October 2021, online meeting

This report provides a summary of the activities for Totally Renewable Yackandandah Inc during the 2020/21 financial year.

Overview

It is true to say that the last year has not felt any less turbulent than the previous one, but steady progress has been made towards TRY's mission of 100% renewable energy and we have had some truly rewarding wins in challenging times.

Although impacting some of TRY's activities, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped most of our work and we have managed to continue despite social distancing and lockdown restrictions. The most visible impacts were in community engagement activities, with a few being put back or cancelled.

However, behind the scenes we experienced the most significant effects in the capacity of our volunteers to contribute, with many juggling increased workloads, changing work and study requirements, plus schooling from home responsibilities, like many others around Australia.

Despite this, TRY has doggedly approached completion for two major flagship projects in the 2020/21 financial year, the *Yack01* community battery and the *100% Feasibility Study*, and with Mondo also completed the *Twist Creek Road Microgrid Demonstration Initiative*, as well as several smaller projects. There were no collaborative purchasing (bulk buy) programs this year, due to a lack of personnel to coordinate them.

The wins, apart from the very satisfying steps on the major projects, were the extra \$171,000 funding from the Victorian government to double the size of the *Yack01* community battery, and the winning of the *Premiers Sustainability Awards 2020* in the *Community* and *Regional Recognition* categories. Another well earned win was the completion of the revamp of the TRY website, after 18 months of funding and personnel struggles, delivering a modern, informative and visual platform to document TRY's regenerative journey. It was also very special to have our co-founder and Vice President, Matthew Charles-Jones, nominated for an *Australia Day Award* in the *Local Hero* category towards the end of 2020.

We finally put to good use the DGR or tax deductibility status that was attained after a long wait in March 2020: we created the structures and procedures to properly administer it and ran a small donation drive just before the end of June this year. Combined with the direct donation page on the revamped website, it provides a simple and compelling option for those that wish to contribute to the 100% goal.

If there has been one sad spot, it is that we have truly missed the strategic, thoughtful and passionate contributions of Matt Grogan, Ben McGowan and Ali Pockley after they stepped down from the committee in June last year. But we are thankful that Indigo Power and other Yack organisations are benefitting from their skills and tireless advocacy.

Indigo Power, the community energy retailer that TRY started as part of our 5-stage roadmap to reach 100%, is an independent thriving entity and has forged ahead, with about 900 regional customers and 210 customers in Yackandandah. As separate entities, we have created a formal Memorandum of Understanding with them that defines our relationship whenever our projects and common goals align. It is incredibly gratifying to see how their project management of the *Yack01* community battery is now benefitting other community battery projects in the Upper Murray region as part of recovery efforts after the Black Summer Bushfires.

TRY has also squeezed valuable time into contributing towards energy policy in the development of the Local Power Plan and the Australian Local Power Agency Bills by Dr Helen Haines MP. This pivotal legislation would provide a fantastic opportunity for rural and regional Australia if passed by the Australian



Parliament. The ALPA bills facilitate small- to medium-scale renewable energy projects, helping the benefits of projects to stay within local communities, and provide financial and technical support for community energy groups.

TRY was part of the expert panel that helped shape the Local Power Plan in 2020, provided feedback on the draft ALPA bill, was one of over 1,000 submissions on the tabled bill from around Australia in early July 2021, and also presented to the parliamentary hearing examining the bill in August. The parliamentary committee is yet to release their final report but TRY and others are hopeful that it will provide non-partisan policy direction with many benefits at the community level.

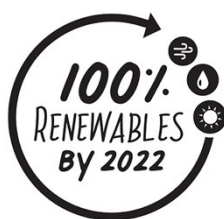
And despite countless zoom meetings and the tedium that they induce, we have been extremely fortunate to gain some new committee members in Frank Dyall and Clare Bishop, along with other new volunteers, all of whom gave generously of their time in the lead up to the *Yack01* launch event in early July this year.

Over the year we have also averaged a request almost once a fortnight from other organisations asking us to present or talk to them about what we are doing. It would be impossible to satisfy all of them with our current resources but we continue to provide presentations, most often online, whenever we can. Along with our policy work, we consider this a crucial part of our mission, letting others know what is achievable, how we did it and the many benefits that a community energy transition can bring to communities as well as our planet.

With the outcomes of the 100% Feasibility Study now imminent, we're planning a strategy session in the next month to plot our path through the final stage to reach 100% renewables.

An update on the projects undertaken by our volunteers in 2020/21 is given below, with all projects contributing valuable resilience to Yackandandah and the community buildings that serve the town every day.

Through all of the recent disruptions, we've kept at it, as our mission seems even more crucial. It might not have the immediacy of bushfires or pandemics, but the things we put in place for our 100% goal will serve everyone in challenging times no matter where those challenges are coming from. That is something that is not just important for Yackandandah, but the rest of Australia and the world.





Projects

Twist Creek Road Microgrid Demonstration Initiative

The work for this project is now complete, with the testing by Mondo last year of network orchestration to improve reliability and local network stability producing very promising results. This third Yackandandah microgrid initiated by TRY involved 17 houses with smart energy controllers or Ubi's, 9 houses with storage batteries, and 5 houses with efficient CO2 heat pump hot water systems. The final report has been written and is due to be delivered to the research participants.

Community Virtual Power Plant or VPP

The VPP was the project that we were awarded the Victorian *Premiers Sustainability Award* for in late 2020 and the network of buildings comprising it continues to grow. One of the 10 participating community buildings was given a boost this year with the Yack CFA station receiving a second battery and a backup generator, allowing the fire station to remain operational even when the power goes out: enormous thanks go to the National Australia Bank and FRRR for providing the funding for that. The VPP will also soon gain two new buildings, with the SES building awarded a grant from Indigo Shire Council's Community Sustainability Grants to fund a solar system, and Wellsford House being awarded a grant from the ANZ Bank Community Foundation. The latter grant will provide a solar system, CO2 heat pump hot water system and improved insulation at Wellsford House, home of the Lions Club of Yackandandah.



TRY Members and supporters with the trophies from the Premiers Sustainability Awards 2020

100% Feasibility Study

The \$346k federally-funded *100% Feasibility Study* commenced in July 2020 and examines the medium-scale energy generation and storage infrastructure required to transition Yackandandah to 100% renewable energy. Funded by AusIndustry's *Rural and Remote Communities Reliability Fund*, this project is now nearing completion with the final report due early next year. The energy consumption analysis and modelling, and technical and financial feasibility modelling are complete, and the final technical report has been written. The remaining components to complete are the community engagement activities, which have been delayed by COVID-19 restrictions, some minor engineering assessments, and the Community Report of the study outcomes.

Yack01 Community Battery

A fundraising drive for the *Yack01* community battery was originally undertaken in mid-2019 but was gratefully augmented by a \$171k grant from the Victorian government's *New Energy Jobs Fund* in September 2020. The project was initiated by TRY, and Indigo Power undertook the project management for installing the 65 kW solar and 274 kWh battery installation at the old sawmill in Yackandandah, now Ben Gilbert's Agency of Sculpture.



Yack01 is the first community battery of its type in Australia, a behind-the-meter, retail facing battery. Indigo Power will own and operate the battery via the issuing of social impact shares to TRY. There were some delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic but the battery installation was completed in July this year with an official opening on the 8th July by the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Lily d'Ambrosio MP. Except for a final milestone report to the funder, this project is now complete.



*The 65 kW of solar panels on the roof of the old sawmill that are part of the *Yack01* community battery installation.*

EV Charger

TRY has been working on installing an EV charger in Yackandandah at the Senior Citizens carpark in Wyndham St. With funds contributed from TRY, YCDCo, and Indigo Shire Council, ongoing scoping work has led to a subsequent grant application and for which we are still awaiting the outcome.

2021/22

Looking to the future, our immediate priorities are the finalising of the 100% Feasibility Study and a strategy session to plot our path over the next couple of years. We have hit the amazing figure of 58% rooftop solar installation density in Yackandandah and we know that we are currently at 60% renewable energy (those two figures are coincidental). We are planning a household battery program with benefits specifically for low-income households and some further community-scale generation and storage infrastructure and we will continue to augment the VPP. There are also plans for a comprehensive energy efficiency program awaiting a suitable grant opportunity.

We are not at 100% yet – there are still challenges to overcome – but the target is within sight and we will continue to focus on projects that bring multiple benefits to the Yack and broader community at all levels.