

# Tributes flow for iconic solar pioneer

by Ken Jones, Director and Company Secretary, Rainbow Power Company

It is with a great sense of loss that the family of well-known long time Nimbin resident and renewable energy pioneer Peter van der Wijk, also known as Peter van der Wyk but better known as Peter Pedals (pictured), advise that he passed away suddenly in Nimbin on Saturday 16th September, aged 78.

Peter became ill while doing his Nim-FM radio program and was taken to Nimbin Hospital where he passed away.

Peter will be sadly missed by daughter Analisa and son-in-law Ryan, brothers John and Albert, ex-partner Elisabeth, extended family Samuel, Svantje and Rosa, nephew Peter, friend Sophia, past and present staff of Rainbow Power Company, together with many friends and acquaintances in and around Nimbin. Peter's sister Hannelies pre-deceased him in 2017.

Peter was born on 16th May 1945 in Rotterdam, Holland to Ids Johannes van der Wijk and Hillegonda (Gon) Wilhelmina Juliana van der Wijk.

The family emigrated from Holland to Australia in April 1952, settling down in Geelong where Peter attended North Shore Primary School and Norlane High School.

Having matriculated in 1963, Peter studied at Monash University in 1965. After a brief stint at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research he moved to Sydney and then Darwin before heading overseas.

Peter travelled extensively through South-East Asia, South

Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States. On his return, he worked as a soil technician in North Queensland for a year and as a surveyor's assistant in Brisbane for another year.

Peter attended the Nimbin Aquarius Festival in 1973 and decided that this was where he wanted to live. After a time working in Sydney, he returned to Nimbin.

The 1973 Aquarius Festival had brought many like-minded thinkers and doers to Nimbin seeking a new way to live sustainably in harmony with nature.

This community was very active in finding ways to bring these goals to fruition and Peter was a big part of this, being involved in many enduring community development projects.

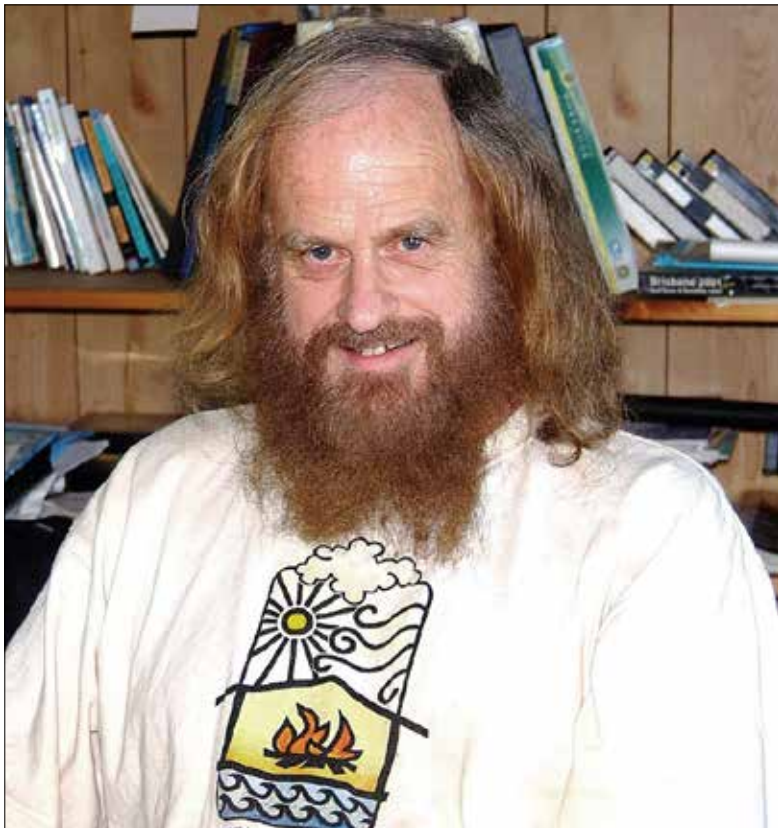
In 1981, Peter came up with the idea for Rainbow Power Company. It took six years for this vision to become reality in 1987. Peter worked at Rainbow Power for 30 years plus, serving on the Board of Directors for a number of years. The company is still going strong today with over 35 staff.

Peter continued his involvement in sustainable energy and community development after his retirement from Rainbow, and was still actively involved right to the end.

### Enigmatic, determined

by Nigel Morris, Head of Business Development at Solar Analytics

Three decades ago, I visited Nimbin's Rainbow Power Company for the first time pondering a change of lifestyle and career. It felt like I had landed in an alternative universe.



I found a ramshackle collective of Aquarius Festival survivors who had built a business out of saving the planet, creating right livelihood and mandating employment equality well before such issues were mainstream.

Hidden behind the bare feet, cheese cloth and pervasive scent of patchouli, I soon realised I was amongst determined, brilliant visionaries who were more than willing to just get on with solving the problem of making renewable energy affordable and accessible.

I quit my job making cars and switched to helping to make solar gear.

One of those visionaries was Peter van der Wyk, aka Peter Pedals.

Unassuming quirkiness and a reputation for bicycling everywhere belied a tenacious determination to just do everything he possibly could to make a difference.

Peter was highly intelligent and driven by deep values to the point where I struggled to connect with him at times, such was his focus.

But I also remember listening carefully to his sage words, though he rarely cast his opinions around. I found him deeply thoughtful and willing to engage in debate, without being forceful or arrogant.

Occasionally, his passion for solving issues would bubble up into stern but short lectures, and he was one of the most broadly

learned people I had ever met.

During my stint at Rainbow Power Company, Peter had been passionately involved in developing the very first training courses in solar and renewable energy.

I remember him cursing "the bureaucrats" who were trying to do the same and correcting their theories and syllabus many times.

Ultimately, he ended up personally delivering many training courses in the company's purpose-built facility.

Nowhere else in the country could you be trained in renewable energy in a factory powered by renewable energy by people who lived almost entirely off grid with renewable energy.

Peter was the enigmatic OG (old guy) of solar hippies.

He was perpetually re-writing and republishing *Energy From Nature*, the ultimate renewables handbook, and actively involved in many aspects of managing and guiding the business.

Pete was driven and often serious as a result, but I have many fond memories of him smiling and cracking strange jokes through a wry smile, before whizzing off to his next important task.

My relationship with Peter was based around our shared work life and community, and I cannot imagine the grief his family and friends must be suffering following his passing.

Pete, you had an indelible impact on me and so many others. You showed us what was possible and what commitment to a cause really was.

Thank you for everything you did and for paving the way for so many.

Rest in peace.

## Peter "Pedals" Van Der Wyk

### Nimbin's pioneer of Renewable Energy



FOREVER LOVED & DEARLY MISSED

16.05.1945 - 16.09.2023