

# Full Steam Ahead for Nimbin Community Solar Farm

After many months of complex negotiations, the Nimbin Community Solar Project is going ahead, on the roofs of six buildings around town.

The Project emerged from the Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre's (NNIC) community forum "Towards a Sustainable Nimbin", held in February 2009, where Energy was identified as one of three priority areas. The forum dreamed of becoming an energy neutral community, generating at least as much energy as is used.

NNIC's Sustainability Survey conducted over December 09 –January 10 confirmed the high numbers of Nimbin-ites on stand-alone solar power (37% of respondents) and low average daily power use (7.64kWh per day). It has been estimated that the Community Solar Project, together with the residential uptake of grid-feed solar systems in Nimbin, will provide the capacity to generate around 85% of total current average power needs, on a sunny day.

NNIC successfully applied for funding from the Australian Government (Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations) under the Jobs Fund program, to build a 30kW solar farm at Rainbow Power Company. After receiving the funding, however, it became apparent that the project would not be viable in its original form, due to the 10kW limit on the feed-in tariff for solar energy generated in NSW.

Without the feed-in tariff, the farm would have earned only between 3c and 5c per kWh for the energy generated, and would not have been able to cover its ongoing costs, let alone achieve the employment outcomes that the project has been funded to deliver.

The farm has now been re-designed into smaller arrays of 10kW or less which will be hosted by six not-for-profit organisations in and around Nimbin. They are Nimbin Bowling Club, Nimbin



Natalie Meyers (centre), Team Leader NNIC, with Paul LeBars (left), President of NNIC and John Davis of Rainbow Power Company.

Community School, Nimbin School of Arts, Blue Knob Hall, Nimbin Headers Soccer Club, Nimbin HEMP, as well as the Nimbin Community Centre, which houses NNIC.

Development Applications will be lodged in relation to each host site for the project by mid-June. Each site will need to satisfy Heritage and in SEPP planning requirements. This is the final hurdle before all the systems can be installed.

In addition to reducing Nimbin's carbon footprint, the Project will create or retain 3 permanent jobs, 3 short-term jobs, one traineeship and 5 work experience placements. (People who need to meet mutual obligations for Centrelink and want to get involved in this project, see Nat at NNIC).

Team Leader of NNIC and Project

Manager Natalie Meyer said, "The fact that we have been able as a community to pull this project together in spite of numerous challenges is testament to the strength of the Nimbin community. When something is important enough, we can effectively unite and work towards a common goal. I don't believe we could have got the project to where it is in any other community."

This Community Solar Project would not have been possible without many hours of advice and support from Rainbow Power Co, the patience and understanding of DEEWR, extensive legal advice from the Environmental Defenders Office (Lismore) and Holding Redlich Lawyers (Sydney), and the commitment and co-operation from the project's six host organisations.



A radio transmission monopole, similar to the one proposed for Rose Road.

Photo courtesy Bill Starling, www.al.com

## Police consider other options for communications tower

The quest to establish additional infrastructure to improve police communications in the Nimbin valley has taken another turn, following a flood of objections to the proposal to site a 20-metre tower on the ridge at Rose Road.

Assistant Police Commissioner Bob Waites said, "We may have an opportunity to use another technology, as part of the proposed Government Radio Network (GRN), which won't be using such tall towers."

The GRN would integrate all emergency service communications in a new digital network, but the network is not planned to be built for another five years.

"We would be looking at bringing that forward, possibly starting the roll-out in this region," said Mr Waites, who is a member of the inter-departmental Senior Officers Wireless

Working Party.

"We work on a 12-month capital works budget, which ends this month, so it depends how our budget submissions are received," he said. "Hopefully a decision will be made by the end of July or August."

Mr Waites said the GRN would be a better solution to eliminating radio 'black spots' for all emergency services, but added, "The secondary site at Rose Road is still a possibility – we haven't made a final decision yet."

When the decision is made, the process of informing residents and Council will start again, with another 21-day period for lodging objections.

"We don't want to make life difficult for people," Mr Waites said.

• See also concerns raised by Lismore City Councillors Jenny Dowell and Simon Clough, on Page 11.