



Annual Report 2015-2016

President's Report by Ralf Thesing, President

This is the 6th Annual Report I am collating as President and I keep observing that each year is bigger and busier than the one before. The most challenging project this year was getting the \$100,000 Community Solar Park up at the old Mill Site. This certainly stretched the Committee and all volunteers involved. But it will be a great asset and income stream for many years to come.

As part of our Macedon Ranges Renewable Energy Fund (MrRef) we provided guidance, project management and an interest free loan to the Woodend Cricket Club for their Solar Project. There is a lot happening in the Renewable Energy space with the Woodend Windfarm being the biggest item on the board. You should have a look at the wind mast [here](https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-37.4251831,144.5059281,1239m/data=!3m1!1e3) (<https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-37.4251831,144.5059281,1239m/data=!3m1!1e3>)

Our Sustainable Living Festival in February took on a new format over two days. Instead of the "Ride for Renewables" we organised a new event: the Sustainable House Day in the Macedon Ranges. The Woodend Farmers market is now well established with the new layout and the central marquee. Too many initiatives to mention, I encourage you to read the reports of the various active groups below.

MRSRG is in a great position at the moment with a lot of interest in our activities not only from our local politicians but also from further afield. Our organisation is being recognised as leading the Community Energy Wave. We hosted tours of our renewable energy projects for Mark Butler (Federal Shadow Minister for the Environment), Bank Australia, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Energy Projects and Kate Auty (ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment). Even the local Council has recently supported us with grants for the Woodend Farmers Market and the next Sustainability Festival. They are currently conducting a feasibility study whether to partner with us in a Renewable Energy Fund. Our membership numbers are growing and a lot of members are getting actively involved in projects and initiatives.

One very important initiative we took on under the leadership of Alice Aird was to look at our own processes and structure and whether there is a better way of doing things. You can read all about the sequence of workshops in her report below. As a result of this we intend to have a smaller committee going forward and more structured project groups.

At this point I want thank all retiring committee members for their valuable contributions. I hope they will stay close and involved in the MRSRG 'movement'.

I have decided that this will be my last report as President as I think a rotation of roles is healthy and important for the organisation. I'm happy to continue on the committee in a different role and to support the transition.

Thank you all for your support and contributions to a 'sustainable' future of MRSRG.

Warm Regards,
Ralf

Ralf Thesing – President

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Group Reports

“Reframing the Future of MRSG” Workshops by Alice Aird

MRSG has been going for quite some years and achieved many great things. Recently quite a small number of people has been supporting a very large and growing number of projects. It was seen to be time to review and transition into a more sustainable organisation for all involved.

Alice Aird facilitated three workshops in June, July and September, which were attended by a total of 23 people, about 15 at each workshop. At the second workshop she introduced the methods of organizationunbound.org to start the process of "Changing the Way We Change the World" (as the short film on their website says).

Organisation Unbound essentially aids social change organisations to practice what they preach - i.e. to be, within their own organisation, the change they want to achieve. So for us, it's about the "sustainability" experience we're promoting being experienced by everyone MRSG touches - by those within the MRSG, as well as our members and local community and beyond. This called "universal expression of purpose".

This "universal expression of purpose" is not just a noble idea – it's found that social change organisations that do that are more successful. They engage and energise more people and achieve more, over a longer time, with new people replacing the 'originals' and continuing the work. This is the vision we have for the MRSG of the future.

Anna Haines stepped up to co-facilitate the third workshop with Alice. Tana Paddock of Organization Unbound is generously supporting the transition process to a more expressive organization via conferencing on skype. We are linked now to a global network of social change groups evolving new ways of supporting such groups to be vital, rewarding and effective.

During the second workshop we expressed our experiences of MRSG, the challenges and what we appreciate; we "framestormed" on the (deliberately slightly provocative) topic: "Most people in the Macedon Ranges are not very interested in working with the MRSG on sustainability or climate change." A rich list of 50 to 75 questions was generated and narrowed down to a short list of 11. Addressing these will help MRSG to inspire more of our community to join in.

In the last workshop on September 18, we renewed our shared understanding of MRSG's purpose. Inspired by that, we mapped how fully our purpose is being expressed in MRSG's various activity areas, with a view to making small strategic changes that, over time, will make a big difference.

Already it's clear where some changes are needed. There is wide agreement that the committee structure and functioning is in need of revising.

Therefore, a primary goal of the workshops was to come up with recommendations to the MRSG Committee, for a revised structure of the committee, and the broad principles of the committee's

role and its relationships with the various groups and activities. Two models have been presented to the committee and the model that will be taken forward will be presented at the AGM.

These workshops are a new beginning, not an end. There will be many opportunities to engage with the work of MRSNG in new ways as we go forward.

Community Energy Projects by Barry Mann

During the 2015/16 period, MRSNG was very active in the Community Energy space, including:

Solar Projects

MRSNG provided project management for the installation of several solar PV systems for private and community buildings located around the Shire, including:

- Black Forest Timber Mill (40 kW system);
- Woodend Tennis Club (8kW battery ready system);
- St Lukes Anglicare in Kyneton (10 kW system); and
- Woodend Cricket and Football Club (6.2 kW system).

The Mill project is Victoria's first community owned solar retail project, where sales of power to the Mill tenants are collected by MRSNG and placed in the Macedon Ranges Renewable Energy Fund (MrREF), a revolving fund designed to build renewable energy capacity throughout the Shire. MrREF was used to provide an interest free loan to the cricket and footy clubs to install their system.

Wind Projects

- MRSNG project managed the installation of a small (1 kW) wind turbine at Heskett Primary School. The turbine has been operating since February 2016, and is also a great educational tool for the students.
- Ongoing wind monitoring at the site of the Macedon Ranges Community Wind Farm, in the Macedon Pine Plantation. Wind monitoring has been ongoing since February 2016, and a summary report from DNVGL is attached to this report. At this stage, the average wind speed at 80 m is approximately 8.1 m/sec. A good wind resource is considered to start at 6 m/sec, which places our wind resource in the 'excellent' range.
- Installation of a sonic detection and ranging (SODAR) device at the wind site. The SODAR is able to measure wind speed at 10 m height interval up to 200 m from the ground, and will provide even more detailed wind data to bolster the viability of the project.
- A series of MOUs with various wind consultants and companies, to conduct wind energy analysis (DNVGL), grid connection (Senvion) and financial analysis (Westwind) on a pro bono basis

Lobbying

- MRSNG hosted a visit to Woodend by the Parliamentary Committee of the Inquiry into Community Energy, including 5 State MPs who were shown all of the CE projects that MRSNG have helped realised.
- Detailed submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, explaining our own struggles to build to a Community Wind Farm and solutions to obstacles faced by CE groups who wish to build

local renewable energy projects, including VC82 which effectively bans wind power in the Macedon Ranges Shire.

- Detailed submission to the review of the General Exemption Order (GEO) which regulates the sale of electricity under the Essential Service Commission. Changes to the regulations (G048 and S393) allowed MRSG to sell solar power at the Mill to the onsite tenants.
- Ongoing lobbying regarding amending the Victorian Plantations Act (1993), which prevents wind power on crown land leased for plantation purposes. Amending this Act will open up over 300,000 ha of crown land for potential renewable energy development.

MRSG would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided by Ms Taryn Lane of Embark, a not-for-profit organisation for building Community Energy projects. We would also like to acknowledge Mr Gregory Clark, who has given up much of his time to sort out technical issues with power monitoring at the Mill.

Woodend Farmers Market by Rob Were

Market Co-ordinator: Sharon Kittson

Market Committee: Chloe Green, David Gormley-O'Brien, Ralf Thesing, Rob Were

The Woodend Farmers Market has had a successful year and continues to be recognised as one of the Shire's premier local events. The market is well regarded in the regional market circuit by stallholders and visitors alike. We have maintained a steady number of patrons and stalls, and have established a healthy baseline from which the market can continue to grow.

This is the first full year working with the new market layout. The changes implemented by taking over the information centre car park and installing the electrical infrastructure has substantially improved the usability of the site. Stallholders have reported increased satisfaction with the new layout and we have lessened the impact of wet weather on the market's success during the winter months. The committee is looking forward to the site drying out enough to install the new pathway on the grassed area. This will create a ring of food stalls around the large marquee and provide a sheltered space for dining and hosting market day talks or live music. Once this is achieved the infrastructure upgrades will be complete.

The market is well placed to continue to build on its current success, with many stallholders reporting that they do better financially at the Woodend market than some of the bigger city markets. We are well supported by our local patrons, for whom the market is a great shopping experience and also a significant social occasion. We have the advantage of our country town warmth and hospitality, and a good mix of high quality stalls that will continue to draw visitors to the market from outside the area.

The support of the local community for the market has been a key asset, especially the hard work by MRSG volunteers. A big thank you to our volunteer network for maintaining a strong group presence at the market each month and ensuring the smooth setup and pack down. The market possesses a great community feel, which is key to its character as a local hub and gathering place and we wish to continue to enhance this aspect of the market.

Sharon has consistently maintained the Farmers' Market facebook page to a high standard, which now has nearly 2000 "likes". Sharon also produces an excellent regular newsletter.

Looking into the future the market committee hopes to slowly grow our stallholder and patron numbers and to support community initiatives around the local food movement. Sharon has recently met with the economic development team at the Shire Council, and as a result has been invited to participate the Agribusiness Forum as the representative of the Macedon Ranges Farmers' Markets. The aim is for a more collaborative approach between the Shire and stakeholders in the food and farming sector so that we can maintain a sustainable, resilient and healthy local food system on which the market and community depends.

Sharon is to be commended on her excellent management of the market and her high quality marketing through the facebook page and market newsletter.

We look forward to another successful 12 months!

Macedon Ranges Vegetarian Eating Group (MrVeg) by Ruth Hodgson

Every year is a bit different. This year MrVeg showcased sustainable food techniques at the *Macedon Ranges Sustainability Festival*, creating a lot of interest. A follow up workshop was held in April to teach fermenting vegetables and other skills. Over 40 people attended overall. The interest is there for this to expand next year.

Semi-regular social events have continued, where all MRSNG members and friends are welcome to bring and share seasonal, sustainable vegetarian food and build awareness of alternatives to meat and dairy dependence. These events involve 12 – 25 people and are a great social event for MRSNG. A new initiative is our KeepRecipe site, to post and share vegetarian and vegan recipes and advice. Directions will be given in the newsletters, and it is hoped that this can be linked more directly to the MRSNG website in future. Core group membership stays constant, but the broader interest from the community in our work is definitely increasing.

Movies That Matter by Kirsty Ross and Peter Hansford

Movies that Matter has entered its 8th year drawing on bigger audiences with an array of thought provoking, challenging and controversial screenings.

The rolling 6 month plan has enabled better advertising although changes in email addresses and closure dates with local newspapers has meant that not all movies have been promoted equally.

The logistics of hosting Movies that Matter has worked well with a team effort this year with Marg Thornell, Ralf Thesing and welcome input from new member Jodie Passmore (a film industry professional) assisting us to ensure the night (almost always) runs smoothly.

Jodie has enabled us to access recently released movies such as Chasing Asylum, Occupy Love and Sherpa.

The screening of Bought, whilst controversial, provided an opportunity for members of the committee and the public to attend the screening and join the passionate discussion afterwards. The more recent releases, the increasingly varied subject matter and the slowly increasing familiarity with the venue have seen numbers of attendees steadily rising.

The screening of Chasing Asylum allowed us to strengthen our relationship with a like-minded community the Macedon Ranges Refugee Support Group and saw more than 40 people attend the night.

Whilst the show has gone on and numbers have increased there remains a need for someone to assist with the sourcing and promotion of films for 2017. A clear benefit of the Movies that Matter program is the opportunity it presents for social contact between members and also as a forum for sharing and publicising the various campaigns and activities of the group.

The organisers would like to acknowledge and thank the Victoria Hotel for their continued generous support of the Movies that Matter program.

Membership Report by Robert Brunton

MRSNG currently has 265 financial members for 2016.

The committee is in the process of investigating a range of software options that will improve member experience and management. A big bonus of a new software solution will be a more streamlined process for membership administration including annual renewal reminders, and online payment and receipting. We are hoping to implement this new system in early 2017.

Woodend Home Produce Exchange by Helen Scott

Now in our ninth year, members have once more increased - to almost 130, for this sociable gathering of locals and some not-so-locals on the first Saturday of every month of the year at Woodend Farmers' Market, such a demonstration of seasonal harvests.

Members at a recent MRSNG workshop rated "The Swap" as one of the most "expressive" and accessible social change projects of MRSNG. It is very gratifying to be described by some of following terms:

"Welcoming; Warm, exciting invitation; Fun, enjoyable; Social; Opportunity for meeting and talking to people; Easy to participate; Small scale; Connecting diverse people gently; Accidental exposure to sustainability; Inspiring; Learning; Educational; Productive; Inclusive; Informal exchange of information (not dogmatic); Supports change in personal action; Serendipity happens."

Thanks as usual to the MRSNG folk for setting the tables, signs and marquees up and down for us.

Helen Scott sends out a monthly email reminder with seasonal musings and interesting links or events to anyone who wishes – contact her at orseda@bigpond.com if you wish to be added to the list. There are plans to involve more members in running the stalls – they see what fun it is and have offered to help, and no doubt welcome new ideas will arise.

The Exchange has a presence on the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group website at <http://www.mrsgonline.org.au/projects/food-localisation/produce-exchange/> with more information on what we swap, photos and various musings ...

"If you want to be happy for a short time, get drunk; happy for a long time, fall in love; happy for ever, take up gardening." Chinese proverb

Permaculture Garden by Denie Green

An average of 4-5 volunteer gardeners come each Friday and donate 2 hours of their time to maintain and nurture the garden to produce a wide range of vegetables, herbs, berries and fruit trees. The three chooks are also an integral part of the sustainability of the garden –processing the weeds and edible prunings to provide manured mulch. In return some-one benefits from the resulting eggs.

A grant of \$1,000 was received this year and funded the much needed upgrading of garden tools including two wheelbarrows and lightweight garden forks and spades etc.. The volunteer gardeners are very appreciative of this generosity as having access to good gardening tools really makes the gardening tasks that need to be undertaken much easier and more enjoyable.

Vegetables and herbs from the garden are used for the monthly community lunch put on by the Neighbourhood House. The staff seem to really appreciate the variety and quality of the garden produce on offer and create delectable vegetarian meals inspired by the garden.

This year a group from Riddell's Creek visited the garden and were interested in hearing how to make compost and grow vegetables in this challenging cool climate.

The group also participated in the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Festival by being available for the general public to ask questions as they looked around the garden.

Sustainable House Day (SHD) by Robert Brunton

MRSNG this year supported the Alternative Technology Association (ATA) by coordinating the Sustainable House Day within the Macedon Ranges. The day held on 11 September was very successful. Four home owners agreed to open their homes to over 150 visitors. Straw bale constructions were particularly popular.

Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival 2016 by Alan Reid and Jon Morgan

The Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival was back again in 2016 with a couple of changes to keep things fresh. The festival was split across the Farmers' Market site and the permaculture garden on Saturday 27 February, with a community picnic at the Children's Park on Sunday 28.

The Farmers Market site hosted 28 different exhibitors and 4 community conversations with a technology focus, specifically sustainable house design, renewable energy and electric vehicles. A highlight was the launch of MRSG's solar project at the Black Forest Timber Mill by Lily D'Ambrosio, the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources.

The Garden site themes were nature, food and community, with 29 different exhibitors and 4 community conversations.

A concurrent and cross promotional event titled Art at the Mill showcased many original works by brilliant street artists on a conservation theme at the Black Forest Timber Mill.

The Community Picnic on Sunday 28 Feb featured live music by talented local musicians, vox pops with Ben Bush from RRR, old time games hosted by Greg Coates, Western Water's H2O Cafe and vegetarian burgers by MR Veg.

The festival was supported through grants and in kind contributions by local MPs Mary-Anne Thomas and Lisa Chesters, the ATA, 3 Fish, SLF Australia and No Fixed Address Gallery.

Festival attendance was down by about 50% or approximately 500 people. The festival organisers Jon Morgan and Al Reid faced several challenges including competing with the St Ambrose, having to relocate from the Timber Mill to the Farmers Market site just days before the event, and securing help with many tasks. As a result, they suggest several changes to next year's festival including:

- Paying a Festival Coordinator to manage key administrative tasks and marketing, and reporting to a committee of volunteers. This role will be funded by a \$6,000 grant secured from MRSC.
- Handing more responsibility to other community groups and organisations to coordinate each theme of the festival
- Avoiding the St Ambrose Carnival and other major local events
- Holding the festival on the same day as the Woodend Farmers market to ensure a larger audience
- Free visitor entry to reach a wider audience and to reduce administration
- Increasing commercial exhibitor fees, e.g. from \$100 to \$200, as most exhibitors said we under charged.

We are looking forward to next year's event and are actively seeking input from our members and others volunteers.

Woodend Bee-Friendly Society by David Gormley-O'Brien

The Woodend Bee-Friendly Society has now entered its third year and is going from strength to strength. Originally conceived as a small group of novice, recreational beekeepers meeting at each other's homes and offering each other mutual support, the Society has evolved in a relatively short period of time to become a vibrant and inclusive beekeeping club, welcoming new and experienced beekeepers and aspirants from a wide geographical area (not only in the Macedon Ranges but as far away as Castlemaine, Bendigo, Benalla, and Ballarat) and with a similarly wide range of different beekeeping perspectives. As a working group of the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group, the Society has two aims, impinging on the area of sustainability: to promote the welfare of honeybees as pollinators and honey producers, and to provide a friendly social environment for its members to learn about bees and beekeeping and to support each other.

Most of this learning and mutual support is of an ad hoc nature, where beekeepers from the Society get together and help each other with capturing swarms or inspecting their hives. Several friendships have formed between members through these encounters. The Society also provides formal occasions for learning and community building through the monthly meetings conducted 3-4.30pm every 3rd Sunday at the Woodend Neighbourhood House, where we often bring in visiting speakers to talk about key topics (for example, Prof. J-P Scheerlinck from the University of Melbourne gave separate presentations on What happens when a bee stings you and Bee genetics; Fiona Marantelli gave a workshop on rendering wax to make candles). In August, veteran beekeeper, Jim Sansom, conducted an Introduction to Beekeeping course over two nights in which 14 keen, novice beekeepers participated.

The Woodend Bee-Friendly Society has a very strong presence on the web and social media. The Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/woodendbees/> has around 240 members, providing a valuable forum for beekeepers to ask questions and share knowledge, and several people follow blog posts on our website at <https://woodendbees.wordpress.com/>

Particularly exciting is the fact that this Society is very outward focussed. There is a universally-shared passion to promote the welfare of honeybees to the wider community at every opportunity. The Society held a very popular exhibition at the *Macedon Ranges Sustainable Living Festival* last February with a live observation hive; some members have given talks through the year at the library, schools and fetes. Indeed this weekend, two of the principal organizers of the Society, Emma Collins and David Gormley-O'Brien, have just returned from a 10 day trip to Sri Lanka, teaching farmers in remote villages about beekeeping as a potential source of income generation, food security, and a deterrent for marauding elephants from a nearby reservation!

Community Climate Chest (C3) by Ralf Thesing

C3 provides a means to offset your CO2 emissions whether they are caused by electricity usage, car or air travel.

- you nominate a renewable energy project to direct your funds;
- all funds go back to the community and to renewable energy projects
- your payment is tax deductible
- you support MRSG

The C3 scheme is being administered by the ATA (Alternative Technology Association) and continues to bring in a small revenue to MRSG. The majority of the commission earnings were received from wholesale donations.

For more info please go to www.climatechest.org.au/host/mrsg

MASH Solar Bulk Buy Scheme by Alan Reid

On 13 September and 4 October MRSG hosted information sessions for residents and businesses interested in the MASH Community Solar Bulk Buy scheme in Woodend and Kyneton respectively.

These sessions included information about battery storage, which is becoming increasingly popular with people wishing to reduce their reliance on mains power even though batteries are still relatively expensive.

Prices for high quality, fully installed MASH solar systems range from about \$3,500 for a 2kW array up to \$15,000 for a 5kW array with 6.4kWh of battery storage.

About 20 people attended each event, which were introduced by Al Reid of MRSG and presented by Jo Kaptein of MASH Solar and Tony Smith of Sunergy (the local system installer), who fielded lots of questions from very engaged audiences.

The final session in the series will be at the Gisborne Senior Citizens Hall, 6 to 7.30pm, Thursday 27 October.

Currently about 20% of households in the Macedon Ranges have solar panels, compared to an average of 15% across Victoria. The best performing municipality in the state is Indigo Shire with about 33% solar penetration. It would be great if the Macedon Ranges could claim the top spot!

Review of our Internal Systems by Jon Morgan

The internal systems that MRSRG uses to manage memberships, events, news and other information are largely hidden from view yet have a significant impact on the effectiveness of our operations. A small group was created a few months ago to review our existing systems and to identify possible improvements - our key objective is to make MRSRG more productive by ensuring that all of the time and effort volunteered by our members is well spent. This will also help to create a sound foundation for the future expansion of the group, ensure that our members are kept up to date with current news and information, and make working with MRSRG more enjoyable for all involved.

We have been looking into the management of member registrations and payments, newsletters and email notifications, event management and ticketing, social media, sub- group discussions and blogs, and a revamp of our existing website. The group has been ably assisted by a local web consultant and MRSRG member, who has been assisting with the review and testing a couple of different online platforms. Although we are still in the testing phase, we expect to make some recommendations in the next few weeks and are aiming to launch some improved online systems before the end of the year.