



GMCA Renewables Bulk Buy

Consultation Feedback

Introduction

The Goulburn Murray Climate Alliance is preparing a request for quote for a renewables bulk buy for four communities in the region. As part of this, we have undertaken a consultation with industry actors and community groups to better understand their needs and the requirements for a successful bulk buy. This consultation has taken the form of interviews with community groups and industry actors, both in person and on the phone.

The following is a summary of the main themes and findings arising from the consultation. It specifically addresses the technologies that should be part of bulk buy, the ability of community groups to support the bulk buy through communications and the framing of the bulk buy when presenting it to the communities.

Consultation Findings: Technologies

- There was general agreement that the technology offered in a bulk buy should not be restricted just to rooftop solar as many districts already have high concentrations of solar
- Rather there should be a range of technologies, including rooftop solar, that complement the uptake and operation of renewable energy. These could include battery storage, electric vehicle and heat pumps.
- Other complimentary technologies and innovations, including glazed windows and insulation, were raised during the consultation. However, it was felt that because of the variability of individual households this would add to the complexity of a bulk buy, compared to standalone technologies which are easier to price.
- Electric vehicles also pose a challenge. It was thought unlikely that we would be able to order enough electric vehicles for a bulk buy to be successful. Even through a successful bulk buy there is a long lead time between ordering a vehicle and it's arriving in Australia. Finally, other social enterprises, such as The Good Car Company, are already operating in this space.
- There is a need to be clear about whether there may be a need for switchboard upgrades as a result of investing in new technologies.
- It was recommended that there be either two separate RFQs or two separate bulk buy streams within the one RFQ, for heat pumps and other technologies. This is because of the additional skills (plumbing) required for the installation of heat pumps.
- It was also recommended that a higher quality heat pump than is available through the state government's subsidised schemes be used in the bulk buy. Under the state government schemes heat pumps are almost free. However, a number of community groups and industry



actors expressed concern about the quality of these heat pumps, in particular their performance in cold climates such as north-eastern Victoria during winter.

- Given that the lower quality heat pumps are covered by the state government scheme there is no advantage to them being included in about five. Consequently, it makes sense to have higher quality heat pumps.
- The idea of bulk buying energy audits from the State government's Energy Efficiency Assessment program could be part of the offer though it is unclear whether this would be as a precursor to engagement about specific technologies or as a stand-alone offer.

Consultation Findings: Communications

- General quality assurance was thought to be an integral part of the bulk buy. Successful bulk buys are built on trust participants have in the councils and organisations running the bulk buy as much as the money they might be able to save. This should inform the communications.
- There was enthusiasm for the framing of the bulk buy around the idea of homes and businesses shifting to a reliance on renewable-powered electricity and away from gas.
- Some caution was expressed in making sure that we don't assume that everybody in the community knows or understands this framing.
- With this in mind, while the all-electric framing can be employed, it should be within the context of communications that have traditionally been successful in bulk buys.
- The bulk buy represents an opportunity to educate the community on why this transition from gas to renewables powered electricity is required (including the scale of what is to come), but it should not be at the expense of successfully selling the technologies.
- While the bulk buy can be open to all households and businesses within the GMCA region, there is also an opportunity to identify and work with target audiences. For example, households in towns without mains gas might be easier to switch to an all-electric household. Similarly, households in areas where there are export limits on the amount of renewable energy might be suitable for home battery storage.
- Local community groups expressed a willingness to participate in the bulk buy to communicate to households and businesses. However, it must be recognized that these groups have limited reach in gaining a large audience. Common forms of communication include newsletters, workshops, and festivals.
- What is not clear is whether the people attending these already have these technologies or are a new audience willing to be engaged. Consequently, while the participation of community groups should be welcomed and managed, we should not be reliant upon them to reach large audiences if that is the intention.



Consultation Findings: Process

- There was identified a need to build in audit procedures to the bulk buy to ensure quality for the participants.
- Both community groups and industry actors understood that the bulk buy may need to go through council budgetary processes in 2023-24 and may not be applied on the ground until 2024-25
- The idea of a pilot program was raised as a way to test the bulk buy methodology and iron out any problems ahead of a full-scale rollout.
- There was a strong preference for using local suppliers where possible and to distinguish between installers and suppliers, the latter being the labour. If there are local installers, that would be the preference. However, it is also recognised that meeting the needs of communities from the 13 GMCA councils may be beyond the scope of one organisation.
- Councils are advised that the budget required for a bulk buy may be higher than anticipated based on previous experience. It was noted that bulk buys run by the former Australian Energy Foundation (priced around \$10,000 per council) were often run at a loss. A more realistic price is likely to be around \$35,000 per council.