**Renewables Bulk Buy Project – Recharging Goulburn Murray**

Briefing Note

Background

1. The Goulburn Murray Climate Alliance (GMCA) is a member-based unincorporated Alliance comprising 13 local governments, the Goulburn Broken and North East Catchment Management Authorities, Alpine Resorts Victoria, and our Associate member DELWP Hume.
2. GMCA was funded by DELWP (now DEECA) in the 2023-24 financial year to develop a tender for a renewables bulk buy to service the needs of its members.

Project Process

1. GMCA employed a Project Officer, who brought together a Project Working Group (PWG), comprised of officers and managers from the participating member councils.
2. The PWG has met regularly to oversee the development of the bulk buy.
3. The PWG identified relevant emissions reduction and complementary technologies to be included in a bulk buy, including:
   1. rooftop solar
   2. battery storage
   3. solar heat pumps
   4. reverse cycle air conditioners
   5. induction cook tops.
4. The PWG discussed other technologies, including insulation and water tanks but eventually agreed on the aforementioned technologies for two reasons: the first was that the technologies could be combined into a consistent communications message centred around electrifying the home, and second, because it would be simpler to provide consistent pricing for these technologies across the region.
5. The PWG was split on the value of the ‘electrifying the home’ message, especially in those regions where grid electricity supply is not consistent.
6. The Project Officer also conducted a broad consultation with interested community groups as industry actors.
7. The community groups were consulted as to their ability and interest in supporting a council-led bulk buy in their region. This support could take the form of passing on communications materials or deeper involvement in the form of responding to a bulk buy tender as a supplier of services.
8. Community groups were supportive of the idea of a bulk buy though differed in their stated ability to support it. Larger, more-established groups were keen to be more directly involved while smaller groups stated that they would help with communications where possible.
9. Industry actors consulted included community energy organisations, such as Indigo Power and Yarra Energy Foundation, and other organisations, such as Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance which has a history of running bulk buys through its aligned organisation, MASH (More Australians Solar Homes) and the Solar Savers program, based at Maroondah City Council.
10. These groups provided valuable advice on the technical requirements and the current state of pricing for bulk buys.
11. It was advice on this latter point that influenced the PWG not to proceed with a bulk buy.
12. Pricing for a standard bulk buy was estimated at about $30,000 per council, based on metropolitan rates. It was anticipated that regional rates would be higher due to the distances that would need to be covered. This is beyond the financial capacity of participating councils.

A Renewables Panel

1. The PWG determined to switch from a bulk buy within a determined time period to, instead, forming a panel of suppliers for the identified technologies.
2. This panel would be supported by a communications strategy in which community groups would play a key role in forming and delivering.
3. Feedback from community groups and industry actors who have developed and delivered bulk buys noted that, while the price advantages gained through this arrangement were a benefit, of greater value is the sense of trust that a council-backed program offers.
4. The community engagement program will be based on a combination of existing council communications, combined with building the capacity of local environmental groups to deliver repeat engagement opportunities or ‘waves’.
5. The repeat opportunity waves effectively replace the large-scale engagement that would be achieved through a bulk buy. Combined with the development and maintenance of the panel, this allows for ongoing engagement rather than a ‘one-off’ bulk buy.
6. This approach also benefits from the social trust inherent in a bulk buy. As noted, this is of primary value for new consumers. The repeat opportunity waves model also provides additional social trust through known local environmental groups and through participants who can act as advocates for a successful program.
7. Each community group will be supported through:
   1. Capacity building sessions covering project management, recruitment and ongoing customer support. These sessions can be delivered online and supported by project management templates to ensure all elements of engagement are covered. Ideally, GMCA can also provide ongoing on-call support responding to specific queries.
   2. Monthly online workshops bringing local environmental groups together to share experiences and best practice. These will be in the form of guided conversations around regular agenda items (e.g. communications, recruitment issues, supplier experiences).
   3. Customer relationship management database – designed and individualised for each local group. Allows group to track who they have approached, who is involved in different waves of recruitment and engagement and outcomes (e.g. solar capacity installed).
   4. Project management website – shared across all projects includes a shared repository of materials (e.g. communications materials) as well as a forum for sharing information in between workshops.
   5. Project website for potential customers, including pages on the project and its participating councils and groups as well as information (e.g. first steps, frequently asked questions etc.)
8. In addition, the councils can assist with the development and provision of specific local communications materials that align with the project and can be used by the local groups.
9. The tender for a panel will determine the scope of the project with regard to likely participation numbers and audiences (e.g. residential, business) and will allow for at least one coordinating body or consortia of installers to respond. It is designed to cover their costs, not the costs of actual installation of technologies which will be borne by the participants.
10. The tender is in the final stages of drafting, incorporating all the technical requirements needed. The PWG will consider a final draft on 26 July 2023.
11. Application of the tender will then depend upon the likely budget required to deliver it. It is likely that funding will need to be sourced from council budgets and therefore will need to go through the council budget process during the 2023-24 financial year, with a view to being successfully funded in 2024-25.
12. The project will also require a lead council to auspice the project and contract the suppliers, as well as a project delivery framework which will be developed by all participating councils, under the GMCA banner.
13. The suggested naming of this new panel-based program is “Recharging Goulburn Murray”.