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## HEPBURN Z-NET WINS PREMIER'S SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

Hepburn Z-NET has won the Community category in this year's Victorian Premier's Sustainability Awards for leading the collaborative plan to make Hepburn Australia's first zero-net emission shire within 10 years.

Renew, a not-for-profit organisation in sustainability for over 35 years, was presented the award, for leading the collaboration of 30 project partners in developing an open-source best practice model to reach the Shire's goal, addressing the need for models of just and inclusive energy transition in rural communities, and by ensuring that project outcomes are available to other communities.

The Hepburn Shire is home to several sustainability groups, together with countless individuals and businesses already aiming to reduce their environmental footprint. The construction of the community-owned Hepburn Wind, resulting in Australia's first zero-net energy town - Daylesford, was a key step in galvanising the region's long-standing leadership.

Mayor, Cr Don Henderson, said it was great for this region to be recognised for efforts in sustainability.

"We have very active and passionate communities within the Hepburn Shire, which positions us well to continue supporting great projects."

"As Council, we can also support community through programs such as Solar Savers, where we buy solar PV systems on behalf of pensioners and low-income households, to be paid back through rates. There is a need for an equal, inclusive and just transition," said Cr Don Henderson.

The logical next step is to address the entire Shire's footprint and move beyond just stationary energy (electricity and heat) and look to other sectors such as transport, waste, agriculture and land use change. The Hepburn Z-NET project aims to support this, by first developing a local emissions baseline using real, local data. In this way, projects can be

designed and scaled to address each problem, while progress can be tracked and improved upon in future.

The concept of 'zero-net emissions' is an interesting one. While it is recognised that some technologies and actions could take decades to transition, the Z-NET plan aims to balance this in order to achieve carbon neutrality. For example, continued use of some internal combustion engine vehicles in the interim can be matched with generation of renewable energy, over and above the Shire's consumption. Carbon sequestration through afforestation and increasing soil carbon is also vital to address emissions from other sectors, with each small local action stacking up to achieve zero net emissions.

The Hepburn Z-NET plan was developed in collaboration with sustainability groups, community members, Hepburn Wind, Hepburn Shire Council, Sustainability Victoria and several others. Its implementation is overseen by a community Roundtable. More information is available at [www.z-net.org.au/hepburn](http://www.z-net.org.au/hepburn).

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