

Co-operative Guide



A clickable guide on co-operatives and
the formation of Hepburn Energy
2025

What is a co-op?

"Co-operatives are jointly owned, autonomous businesses formed to benefit their members who are also their owners. In a co-op, ownership and control is shared equally amongst members who use the enterprise to meet a common purpose." [BCCM](#)

A co-operative, or "co-op," is like a team where everyone works together to reach a shared goal or purpose. Everyone in the group has a say. And everyone helps run the group, making decisions together like a big family.

Watch the video below to learn about early co-operatives:



Purpose

Co-operatives work together to meet their common purpose.

Hepburn Energy's common purpose is to take action on climate change and generate community energy. The co-op aims to reduce local emissions and build community resilience.

People in co-operatives come together to take action rather than waiting for the government or large corporations to take action for them.

"To fight poverty, one should fight dependency first"

*Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen
Co-operative Pioneer*



Values

Core co-operative values:

>>> Self Help

>>> Self responsibility

>>> Democracy

>>> Equality

>>> Equity

>>> Solidarity

Co-operative members value honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

In a co-operative, every member's voice matters equally. They operate on the principle "one member, one vote" regardless of how much money the member has invested.





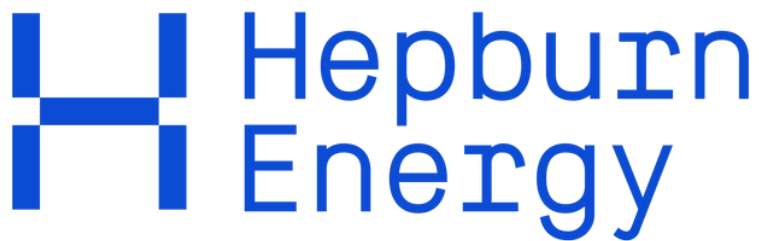
"Co-operatives empower their members and strengthen communities. Because they are the people impacted, they are better tuned to the needs and better positioned to ensure local growth. By pooling resources, they improve access to information, finance and technology. Their underlying values offer a compass in challenging economic times. By contributing to human dignity and global solidarity - cooperatives truly do build a better world."

Mr Ban Ki Moon, Eighth Secretary General of the United Nations, 2007-2016

How do you set up a co-operative?

1. You'll need a bunch of people who set a goal, purpose or cause & want to work together to achieve it
2. You'll need at least 5 active members & a board of directors elected by the members
3. Next, set up some legal things. Do you want to be a distributing or non-distributing co-operative? This means, do you want to share profits with your members or put all profits back into your purpose
4. You don't have to be 18 to join a co-operative, but you can't vote or join the board until you're 18





The Hepburn Energy co-operative (originally Hepburn Wind) was established by a bunch of people who got together because they wanted to take action against climate change. They pooled money, were awarded government grants and became the first community-owned wind farm in Australia.

Hepburn Energy is a
distributing
co-operative and its
members own our wind
turbines!



People are at the centre of our co-operative - around 2000 of them. Our co-operative has 1980 member-owners, including 6 voluntary board members and two part-time staff, plus a bunch of partnerships with like-minded groups.

What's great about co-ops is that the members are owners too. Everyone has an equal say in how things are run.

Our members join forces with a shared goal: tackling climate change and advocating for community energy. These people are the centre of our co-operative, they are what made our wind farm a reality.

How did the Hepburn Energy Co-op begin?

Back in 2005, before the Hepburn Energy co-operative was formed, a proposed large-scale wind farm had received strong community opposition. Misinformation about wind farms caused a lot of fear.



Some people were disappointed and wanted to find a way to grow local support for wind turbines. They drew inspiration from the success of co-operative energy models in Denmark and other parts of Europe. These locals came together to explore a community-owned alternative. This group actively engaged with residents, shared important information, and built support within the community.



In 2007, Hepburn Wind officially became a co-operative. By 2011, when the wind turbines were complete, nearly \$10 million had been raised by over 2,000 mostly local members, who had become shareholders and owners of Australia's first co-operative wind farm.



Watch the video below to learn how our co-operative began:



Since then, the co-operative has gained worldwide recognition for community engagement in the renewable energy field. Our wind farm is now working towards solar and battery storage. That's why we switched our name in 2021 from Hepburn Wind to Hepburn Energy – to show that we're aiming even higher!



The Australian energy market is highly volatile, and our co-operative faces challenges all the time, due in part to our small scale. Cuts to the Renewable Energy Target and a lack of Federal energy policy that is supportive of mid-scale renewables have impacted the income from our wind farm. To tackle this, we advocate strongly for our sector to be recognised and supported.

We are also working on building resilience into our co-operative. We work on projects that help us manage risks, create income streams, and give back to our community and members.



Community Impact

But our co-operative does more than just generate clean energy!

Each year, our co-operative contributes \$30,000 (\$15,000 for each turbine) to support climate resilience and help the Hepburn Shire community reach zero net emissions by 2030.



Our Impact Fund helps build community resilience, sustainability, and engagement.

In total, from 2011 to 2024 the co-op has contributed \$326,916 towards 97 community benefit-sharing projects. But what's even more amazing is that these projects leveraged a further \$6,187,459 in community value. That's a leverage point of almost 19 to 1.

From 2011 to 2024:

- 15 Community energy projects
- 17 Community development projects
- 59 Community grants
- 4 EV Chargers

More than 450 homes and over 80 community groups have benefited

Hepburn Energy Timeline



2005

Local architect Per Bernard formed a steering group and began looking for wind developers for a community co-operative wind farm model. Our Leonards Hill was identified as an excellent site and community engagement began.

2007

The Hepburn Energy (Hepburn Wind) co-operative was formed

2010

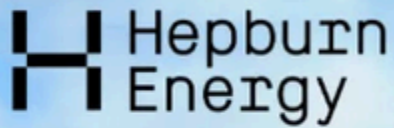
Construction of the wind turbines began in October 2010 with the first 'turning of the sod' as a Ground Breaking Ceremony

2010 Innovator of the Year Award



H 2011 Construction of our wind turbines, Gale and Gusto

Share



Wind turbine construction 2011



Watch on YouTube

2011

By 2011, the co-operative had over 2000 member shareholders. The turbines were completed & the wind farm was first connected to the electricity network at 12:30 pm, 17 May, 2011.

Our two wind turbines were named Gale & Gusto by a local student who won our naming competition (there were thousands of entries).

H 2011 Hepburn Wind Farm Launch Festival

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2011 Hepburn Wind launch festival



Watch on YouTube

2011

2011 Victorian Premier's Sustainability Award
2011 Banksia Environmental Award
2011 Australian Sustainability Award

2012

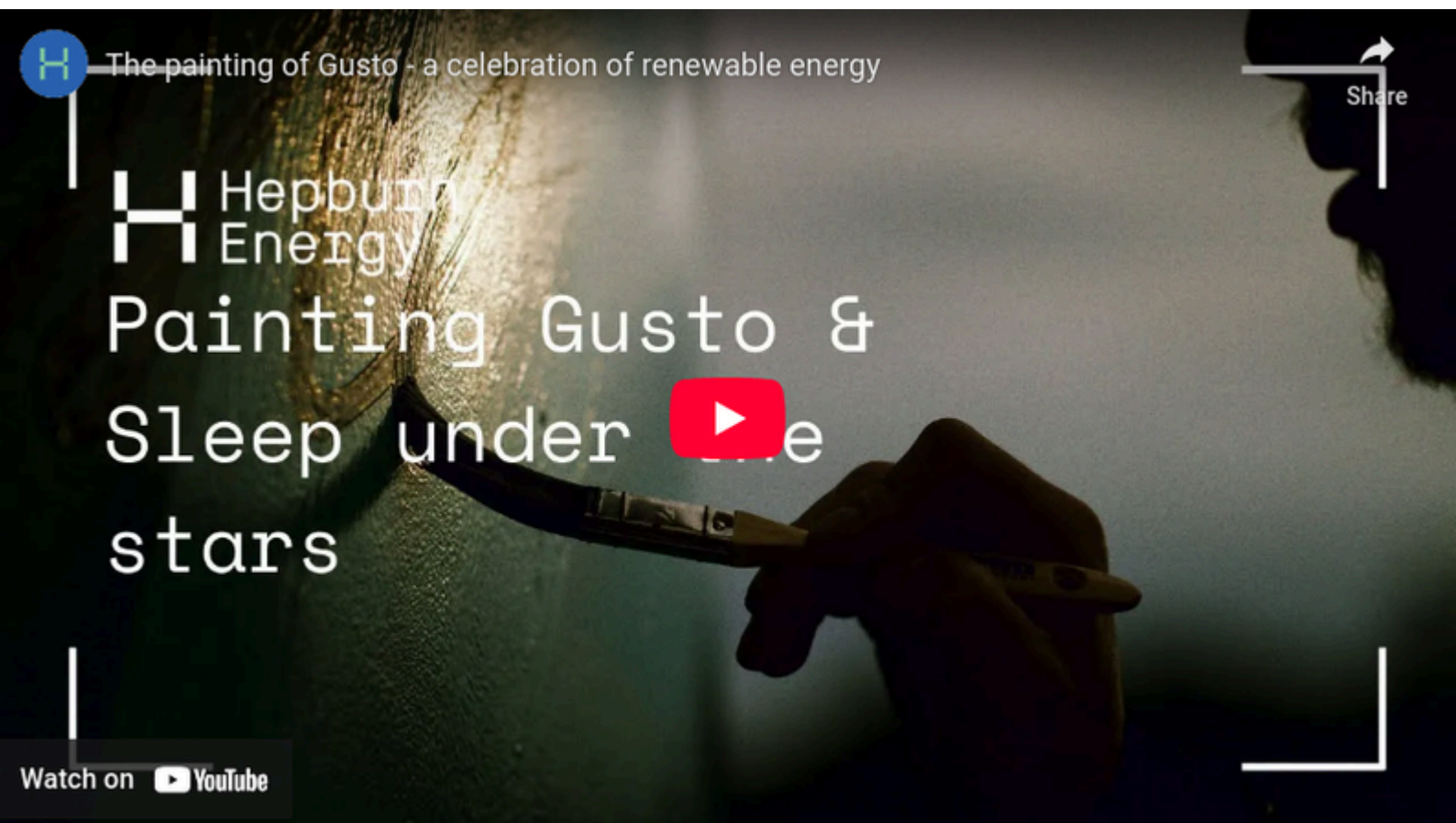
2012 World Wind Energy Award
2012 UN International Year of Co-operative (Australian flagship project)

2013

Gale was painted by Bonsai and team

2014

Gusto was painted by Ghostpatrol and Bonsai and team.
'Sleep under the Stars' event at wind farm to celebrate renewable energy.



Hepburn Energy Timeline



2016

Al Gore feature video of the 2016 United Nations Climate Change Conference

2017

Celebrating Pioneering Communities Event
Renewable roadshow - Guardian Piece
Emergent Feilds Artist residency



2018

Cameron Robins Artist residency
Z-NET Hepburn Partnership formed



2020

Human sign
Co-operative name change from Hepburn Wind to Hepburn Energy



Hepburn Energy Timeline

2022

Planning permit for solar and battery approved

2025

Community Battery works begun



Feeling inspired?

Other community groups take action on climate change too!




A path towards low carbon communities in Hepburn Shire



Share

Climate change • Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and...



Watch on  YouTube



znet
HEPBURN SHIRE

Hepburn Z-NET is a collaborative partnership that brings together community groups, organizations, experts, and the council. Our aim is to achieve zero-net energy in Hepburn Shire by 2025 and zero-net emissions by 2030.

Hepburn Energy is a main partner in this effort. The Hepburn Z-NET website offers tools and actions to help our community reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Learn more

Our community's efforts show what we can achieve as a group to take action on climate change when we put our minds to it.

Co-operatives are helping Australians meet current and future challenges like:



- Affordable housing
- Renewable energy
- Climate change
- Consumer-centred disability and aged care
- Workers' rights in the gig economy
- Indigenous employment
- Food security

What are you and your friends passionate about?

What could you and your friends create together to benefit your community?

When you have your group together with a shared purpose and are ready to go check out this co-op builder tool from our peak body BCCM:

[CO-OP BUILDER TOOL](#)



