

Biomass Support a Christmas Present For Timber Communities

It was pleasing to read Philip Davis' support for developing a biomass electricity generator at Orbost (SRM, 16 December). At last an elected leader is vocally supporting this most available, cost effective and environmentally viable means of alternative energy.

Dear Editor,

The proposal for a char plant at Lithgow was killed off a few years ago by anti-timber activists, thereby killing the local solar panel industry. Wind turbine whole of life costs are unlikely to be recouped by power generation without heavy subsidies. So why aren't we encouraging biomass power?

Originally explored as an energy option for Orbost during the 1990's, biomass technology and acceptance has developed to the extent that it is widely used in many countries including as the USA, Scandinavia and European Union. In Germany, it accounts for 70% of that country's renewable energy.

The SEFE wood chip export mill is proposing a biomass power generator for Eden. The fuel is free, as sawmills have already paid for all the timber with waste and residues currently being incinerated or sold for garden products where they slowly rot and release methane. With biomass power, waste is burnt at extremely high temperatures resulting in extremely low emissions. Electricity generation is the by-product of the process where currently it's just smoke.

SEFE's proposal utilises only residue on the site, yet would produce all of the mill's electricity and provide enough electricity for more than 2,500 homes. Biomass generation proves extremely cost effective and successful overseas in small and remote communities similar to Orbost. It is clean, efficient alternative energy and would create alternative employment in the district. Waste disposal costs from the timber industry would subsequently reduce with cleaner air being a bonus.

Opposition to biomass power will come from anti-timber activists, masquerading as "environmentalists". Environment East Gippsland previously opposed the concept with its standard and predictable scare campaigns. Its mantras are evidenced by comments attributed to Jill Redwood in another article in the "Snowy" (45,000 hectares of forest protected) – like cutting down trees releases carbon into the atmosphere! These are trees, not party balloons!

More comments were akin to a spoilt child wanting every present under the Christmas tree. Not a single "thank you" was mentioned for the Government legislating 41,000 hectares of productive forests into National Parks, nor a "you're so generous" when another 4,000ha was needlessly added to that. What does Jill Redwood want? She wants all the native forests closed and then re-train and send timber workers to other areas of the state for work!

These are real people with real jobs in real communities, concepts foreign to Redwood followers. Our timber workers share a strong sense of community and are proud of their industry.

My organisation fully understands and supports biomass power generation. The best Christmas present that Orbost and other East Gippsland timber communities could get is unilateral support for such a project

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