



MAYORAL MEMO - 24 MAY 2023

The CSIRO Parkes Radio Telescope was opened on 31 October 1961. It was, and still is, a world class instrument at the forefront of radio astronomy. Almost from the time that it was opened, the public visited the site to look at this marvel of technology. Realising this opportunity, the CSIRO opened the Observatory Visitors Centre on 14 February 1969, just a few months before the moon landing.

The 100,000 people who visit each year have a chance to learn about astronomy and science and experience hands-on exhibits. There is a café and a souvenir shop with the main attraction being the 64m telescope that, well, just sits there.

Construction on the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme started on 17 October 1949 and was fully completed in 1974. In the early fifties it was realised there was a huge educational and tourism opportunity so the first visitor centre was opened. This was well before the scheme had started generating power and improving agricultural productivity along the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. The current update of that centre was opened two decades ago as the Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre in Cooma, owned by Snowy Hydro Pty Ltd (owned by the Federal Government).

The current centre offers interactive displays and exhibits about the Snowy Mountains Scheme including the history, engineering feats and information about the role of Snowy Hydro in the complicated National Electricity Market. Of course there is also a café and souvenir shop to cater to more than 100,000 annual visitors including 150 schools.

The Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ) is the most advanced of the five REZs identified in this State. Although not technically part of the REZ, we are already seeing wind turbines and solar panels appearing around Bodangora, North-East of Wellington. When EnergyCo completes the construction of the new 500kV and 330kV power lines to enable at least 3GW of renewable projects, this area will produce approximately forty-seven per cent of the power required by the households of this State.

From an economic perspective, the community will see a large influx of workers during construction but, unlike a mine, once completed, wind and solar projects are not labour intensive. The ongoing economic injection will be minimal compared to the contribution to the State.

But...I have a plan.

Nyngan has a 102MW solar farm over 250 hectares that was commissioned in January 2016. Nevertire has a 132MW solar farm spread over 202 hectares that was officially completed in December 2019. Both have viewing platforms. I find it fascinating that people visit to look out across solar panels. But then again people look at a big dish that, as mentioned, just sits.

I am determined for the Wellington area to gain long-term benefits from the CWO REZ and I sense an opportunity. Once the pulse of construction

work has been completed, we need some way of continuing the economic injection.

I believe there is an opportunity for EnergyCo to build a Renewables Education and Activities Centre (REAC) at Bodangora.

This is not revolutionary but merely logical. We have well-trodden paths with the Dish and the Snowy Scheme. We have a desperate need to educate the public about the operation of renewables and the National Electricity Market and we have three added bonuses.

Firstly, we can see action. Wind turbines move. They look majestic. There is something exciting to see out the window of the visitation centre. Did I mention the Dish just sits?

Secondly, people interact with electricity every day. Many Australians have solar panels on their roof. Gaining further understanding about the generation of electricity would be of interest.

And thirdly, there is the chance to add an adventure component. Imagine the construction of a dummy wind turbine that was built for climbing and viewing. Climb the 80 stairs to the top of the ten-metre tower and walk inside a simulated gearbox of a wind turbine. Look out across the rolling hills where you could see wind turbines and solar panels across a 12-kilometre radius. Be brave with an outside viewing platform! Abseil down the outside – OK, maybe I am getting carried away now...

An amazing opportunity – or am I just dreaming? Let me know at mayor@dubbo.nsw.gov.au

Councillor Mathew Dickerson

Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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