



Sustainability Advisory Committee

Tuesday 1 August 2023

6.00pm

Council Chambers

209 Comur Street, Yass

ATTACHMENTS TO REPORTS

Sustainability Advisory Committee

Attachments to Reports

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28 June 2023

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Mr Berry

Submission on the Draft Sustainability Policy

In response to Council's call for submissions on Yass Valley Council's *Draft Sustainability Policy* (the Policy), I offer the following comments for consideration.

1. The Policy appears to rely heavily on a related document that is frequently referred to as a *Sustainability Assessment Framework*. This document reads as if it is the main mechanism to deliver on the intent of the Policy.

That *Sustainability Assessment Framework* was not put out for public consideration. When I questioned the availability of that document with Council to enable a better consideration of the Policy, I was advised it would not be available as Council had resolved to only seek comment on the *Draft Sustainability Policy*.

This seems to be an entirely unreasonable position to take, given the prominence of that document in the Policy. It weakens the ability of the community to fully understand and comment on the Policy, while diminishing the work of Council's own Sustainability Advisory Committee.

2. The Policy provides no mechanism for reporting on its implementation or effectiveness. While the Policy appears to require sustainability to be embedded into all Council's activities and decision-making, there is no clear reporting mechanism for the public to understand how this is being carried out. Without an understanding of the *Sustainability Assessment Framework* that Council and Council staff are to use in their operations, there is no means for the community to understand how the Policy will be, or has been, implemented.

A reasonable approach on reporting on the implementation of the Policy could be:

- o to include a clear statement in all relevant reports to Council, details of consultation with the Sustainability Advisory Committee, along with the Committee's response; and
- o for the Sustainability Advisory Committee to regularly report on the consultations Council staff have had with the it on broader policy and strategic matters.

3. The Policy appears to rely strongly on the ongoing work of the Sustainability Advisory Committee. It sets a forward program for that Committee to work on but provides little to no detail on how Council and Council staff will work towards achieving the Policy objectives.

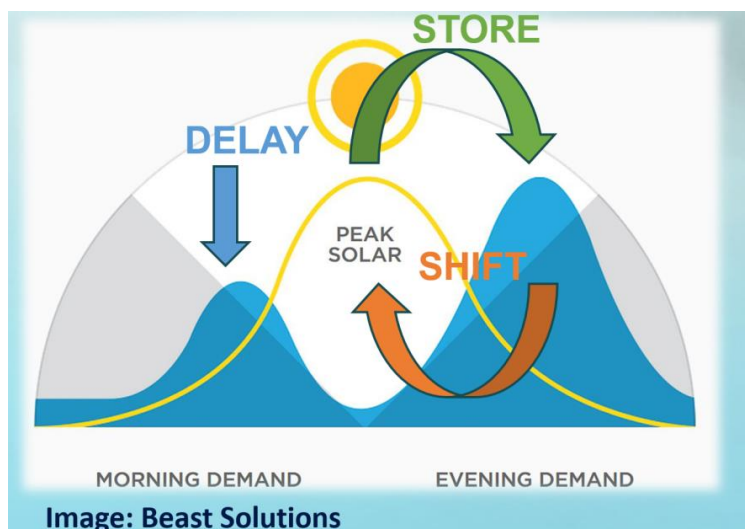
Again, I suspect the provision of the *Sustainability Assessment Framework* document may be of assistance in understanding how Council staff will implement the Policy. It is regrettable – and less than transparent – that the community cannot understand how Council staff will be acting to ensure sustainability is embedded into Council functions, as it appears the Policy is aiming to achieve.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted signature]

COMMUNITY-SCALE BATTERIES store excess renewable energy during peak energy supply (usually daytime for solar), and release it back to the community, and any excess to the grid, when energy demand is highest at night. Such batteries are gaining widespread interest and investment across Australia.



The establishment of community-scale batteries potentially offers –

- Reduced energy costs for all connected
- Income from excess energy provided to grid
- Stabilising the overall electricity grid by providing energy during peak demand
- Disaster resilience when grid shuts down e.g. during bushfires and storms
- Increasing local reliability of power
- Reduction in Carbon Emissions overall
- Social equity in providing cheaper energy to ALL households connected, including renters and those without PV
- Local jobs and skills increase

An ANU Research Report on Implementing Community-Scale Batteries finds that -

‘Community-scale batteries have the potential to play an integral role in Australia’s transition to a decentralised grid..... our work has shown that the location and sizing of this type of storage makes it uniquely suited to providing social, economic and technical benefits to the broader energy system..’ Their research also found that householders wanted affordable, reliable, secure energy for all, with some emphasis on social equity, and believe this is most possible at the community level.

A community battery can be –

- a) **Owned** by the community outright and drawn from directly, or
- b) **Operated** for the community as virtual storage by a third party, or
- c) **Operated to benefit** the community indirectly e.g. by profits flowing back to the community

Who could own a community battery in Yass Valley?

- **Distribution Network Service Providers** - face some regulatory barriers making it difficult to be both a retailer and network provider simultaneously?
- **Retail-owned Batteries** – often face customer trust issues
- **Community Owned (Not for Profit) batteries** - face logistical issues – funding, siting of battery, maintenance, etc. And will probably require a contract with local energy provider
- **Councils** -
- **Community Banks**
- **Other?**

Will the Batteries be provided Behind the Meter, In front of the Meter, or Both?

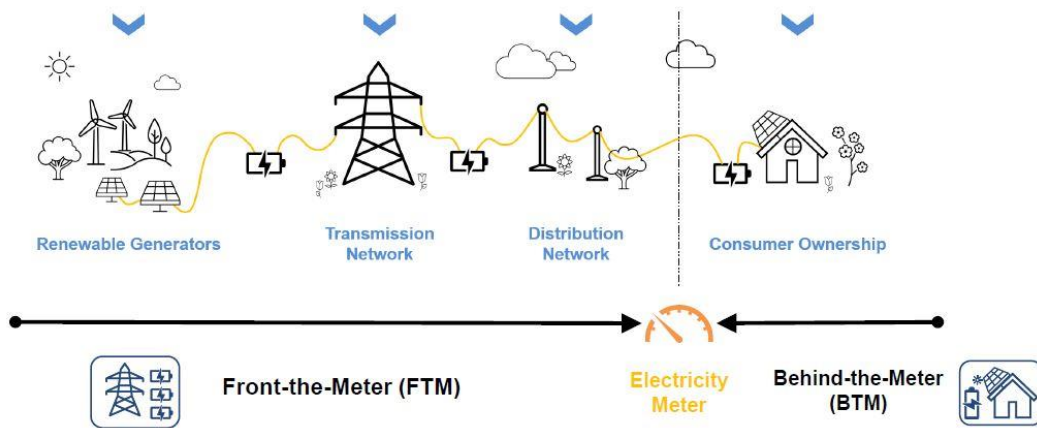
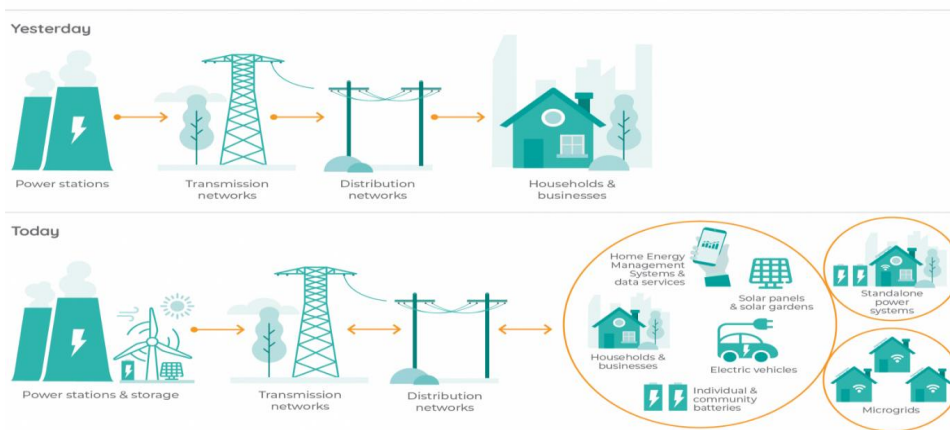


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the electricity grid, showing the separation of front-of-meter and behind-the-meter. Source: IDTechEx



The questions for the Committee are – what are our priorities here?

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Build community and social equity
- Increase network reliability in the face of climate change
- Increase regional self-sufficiency in energy provision
- Establish an income stream that can be returned to sustainable community ventures

We also need to consider –

1. Will Community-Scale batteries be the answer?
2. Can they be incorporated into new sub-divisions in the Yass LGA? If so, how?
3. Should we simply focus on other forms of improving energy efficiency in Yass LGA?
4. Do we approach the Community on this? If so - How? When? Where? Who?
5. Do we further educate ourselves by engaging with local organisations attempting to establish community-scale batteries, such as ACT Govt and ANU?

It is important to understand that the positive benefits of community batteries are not guaranteed. Batteries can decrease emissions, but only if charging from renewables and displacing fossil fuels.

There is also no guarantee that a community battery will improve social equity either. Emerging models are targeting opportunities to solar owning households, or retail 'savvy' customers, increasing existing inequalities between households rather than fixing them.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS:

The Australian Government has provided \$200 million to deploy 400 Community Batteries across Australia, being delivered through a series of funding rounds.

A \$120 million grant round closed on 30 June 2023. The remaining \$280 million in grants will be distributed in future funding rounds.

It may be warranted approaching Essential Energy as to whether they would be willing to work with Council on developing a trial proposal for funding under this grant scheme.

Consideration might also be given to discussions with Engie as to their level of interest in supporting a community battery initiative given their proposed investment in the Yass Solar Farm.

