

SUSTAINABILITY

POWER OF ONE

Yackandandah is harnessing the sun's energy to offset the carbon footprint of its major festival, writes

BEN ROBSON.

“THEY say the world is changed by example not by opinion — and I think that sums up what we’re all about.”

Chris Smith is the Yackandandah Folk Festival chairman and knows a thing or two about change.

After 17 years, the event has grown from a humble fund-raiser for the local school to a festival that draws thousands and involves much of the community.

And this year it has reached one more milestone, offsetting its carbon footprint in what is thought to be an Australian first for folk festivals.

The Yackandandah Folk Festival has joined forces with the town’s petrol outlet to harness the power of the sun to fuel this year’s festival.

Already known for its efforts to reduce carbon emissions, the festival committee has bought 3KW of solar power from the Yackandandah Community Development Company to cover its prints.

“A lot of musicians I know are very conservation-minded,” Chris says.

“And a lot of them have the notion they can change the world through their music.”

“They get the message out in their music and they get their message out in their actions.”

“And we are trying to do our bit for entertainment and minimising the cost on the planet while we’re doing it.”

The solar panels have been installed by the YCDeCo, which operates the community-owned Yackandandah farm and fuel outlet yFuel.

They have launched yEnergy and installed 12KW solar panels to cut power bills and reduce carbon emissions.

“The service station is owned by the community,” Chris says.

“By working with them and paying for the solar panels up there the additional panels generate electricity and it’s been worked out the footprint of the festival is more than offset by the panels.”

“The servo also has a grants process so the money they’re saving can go back into the community.”

“Yackandandah has a sensational arts community covering theatre,



The Yackandandah Folk Festival has grown from a humble fund-raiser for the Yackandandah Primary School to a major festival. RIGHT: Matthew Charles-Jones and Chris Smith welcome the town’s commitment to sustainability. Picture: PETER MERKESTEYN

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music and artists; there’s also a strong community feeling.

“Business people got together and put the service station together — we all love it out here and it generates that sort of community feeling.”

“We’ve got another group doing a community garden that’s about to be opened set up beside the swimming pool.”

“This would have to be the biggest event in Yackandandah — it started off 17 years ago as a fund-raiser for the school and it’s grown from there.”

“Now a lot of the community groups and clubs have it as a fund-raising weekend.”

“There are over 100 volunteers and in a community of around 800 people it’s not a bad effort.”

Chris says that the folk festival has always had a green conscience, and that a green team was added to the committee four years ago.

“These guys have been sensational, from organising waste separation into rubbish, recycling and compost and have been building up from there,” he says.

A number of years ago the commit-

tee for the festival allocated a value on their tickets which was used for tree planting.

But the issue they faced was that some of the trees died in the drought conditions.

“It became a challenge where and when to plant them,” Chris says.

Ahead of the festival there will be a community energy forum tomorrow from 12.30pm to 4.30pm at the Yackandandah Senior Citizens Centre in Wellsford Street.

Matthew Charles-Jones, Indigo Council’s solar projects officer, says it is an event independent of the festival, but sharing its ideals.

“Matthew is one of our original green team and he’s very passionate and his enthusiasm has rubbed off on other people,” Chris says.

“He’s a realistic greenie which is what I admire — he talks it, he lives it, he does it.”

The community energy forum will discuss opportunities for locally-owned power and hear from speakers who are driving the process in communities across Australia.

“There is a common denominator

as many people who are enthusiastic about the folk festival are interested in energy in general,” Matthew says.

“We have two leading thinkers and people involved in the community renewable energy industry speaking about what’s going on around the world and Australia.”

“Especially in the Indigo Shire where, according to Clean Energy Council data, we have the highest density of rooftop solar panel installations at 22.8 per cent of any municipality in Victoria.”

“With that level of awareness and commitment, residents could partner with businesses, or a whole town, and could technically be independent of the electricity grid within five years.”

With 40 acts, more than 200 musicians and up to 2000 visitors for the festival next Friday to Sunday and up to 5000 people at the Sunday market, the festival’s green message will be heard by many.

But of course it’s just as much about the music.

“Once the weekend starts it’s such a joy to see so many happy people around the town,” Chris says.

